

# OUTLINES OF RUSSIAN CULTURE

## *Part I*

Religion and the Church

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## *Part II*

Literature

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## *Part III*

Architecture, Painting, and Music

# OUTLINES OF RUSSIAN CULTURE

## *Part II*

# Literature

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SECULARIZATION OF LITERATURE

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IN the peasant huts of any remote district in Russia even until the Revolution there could be found in the corner under the icons, together with the Psalter and the Acatistus<sup>1</sup> of the Holy Virgin, a much-thumbed copy-book, scribbled in an awkward but modern hand. It begins with the story of the Archangel Gabriel leading the Holy Virgin through the infernal regions. In Hades a river of flames flows from east to west, and in it stand the sinners; these are the people who did not respect their parents and spiritual fathers, sinned against the Seventh Commandment, and for fun taught their children the use of profane language. From another dark river a great wail is heard: there those who crucified Christ are suffering torments. A persistent worm is eating those who did not fast or who failed to go to confession and partake of the Holy Sacrament. Vicious serpents are biting the faces and hearts of those who spoke, laughed, or whispered in church instead of listening to the divine chant and worshipping the holy icons. There is also a place for the shepherds of souls, who having seen the light preferred the darkness: they did not teach the people, did not read the holy books, and prevented the Christians from entering the Kingdom of Heaven. With them too are the unjust judges, who condemned the righteous and exculpated the wicked, and the tsars, princes, and boiars who mercilessly tortured their slaves. Following this "Pilgrimage of the Holy Virgin through the Infernal Regions," which enumerated the ecclesiastical, moral, and social ailments of ancient Russia, the

<sup>1</sup> A special form of prayer used in the Orthodox church to glorify Jesus Christ, the Virgin or any particular saint.—ED.

copy-book contained another story—the “Narrative of Clement, Pope of Rome, on the Twelve Fridays.” One who observed the fast on one of them would be immune from ague, enemies, sword wounds, evil forces, drowning, and sudden death. Finally, a third story lent to the copy-book the character of an amulet. It was “A Dream of the Holy Virgin,” and one who copied this “dream” and read it once a week obtained absolution of his sins, though they were as abundant as the leaves on a tree, or the sand at the bottom of the sea, or the stars in the firmament, and in the beyond he would enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and on earth be safe from perils and sickness. The dream was simple in content. While sleeping in the holy city of Bethlehem, the Mother of God dreamed of the agony that awaited Christ in the future; on awaking she related it to the Saviour, who verified its truth and promised to send the dream forth to the people, endowing it with great power.

The much-thumbed little copy-book must not be viewed with scorn, because although its contents are meager, the legend and exorcism introduced in it are so typical of the ancient popular conception of the world that they constitute a remnant of the stately structure of medieval Christian literature, the cornerstone of which was laid in the early centuries of the present era. Through the entire Christian East, in Egypt, Syria, and the Balkan peninsula, the pious imagination labored intensely under the fresh impression made by the newly acquired faith, and this period of increased creative power produced a number of Christian images and legends which during a whole millennium sustained Western art.

The new faith supplied religious poetry with abundant material because from the time when the New Testament was first written the pious imagination had an unlimited field for producing a literature of its own, parallel to the canonical books of Holy Scripture. What connection was there between the New and the Old Testaments, between Christ and Adam? What did Adam do after his banishment from Eden? How did he plough? How did he bury Abel, having no previous knowledge of death or burial? How did the Mother of God live during her childhood? What were the details of the Agony and Crucifixion of the Saviour? The canonical books gave no definite answers to these questions. In

the official history there was a blank after each question, which was at once filled in by the religious legend. Christ had atoned for the sin of Adam: this principal formula of the Christian theological system was immediately embodied in realistic forms by the artists and poets. Satan deceived Adam and forced him to sign a pact, according to which Adam surrendered himself to the commands of the evil one. This agreement was traced upon a stone, which Satan hid in the river Jordan, with four hundred devils keeping watch, but when Christ was baptized he stepped upon the stone and crushed it: thus was Adam's bondage destroyed. There is another version of this legend. Taking the bough of a tree in Paradise, Adam made for himself a crown in which he was buried. From the crown there grew a huge tree entwining its roots around Adam's coffin. This tree was brought to Solomon for the building of his temple, but it was not used, and together with the coffin was planted on Golgotha. The cross of Christ was made therefrom, and the blood of the Saviour trickling through the soil dropped upon Adam's head, thereby absolving him and redeeming him from sin (this was the origin of the skull at the foot of the Crucifix). By way of these graphic representations the abstract Christian doctrines were made clearer to the understanding of the masses. Such was the mission of Christian poetry.

The Christian Legend, either created independently in the East, or adopted from the ancient Hebraic sources, was closely interwoven with the many interesting episodes and outstanding characters of the Old and New Testaments. Adam, Cain, Abel, Enoch, Lamech, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Solomon, Pilate, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea—all were assigned a part in the Legend, and eventually it transformed the biblical story into a novel, in which it was difficult to separate reality from fiction.

Thus satisfying the aesthetic demands of the faithful, these treasures of Christian poetry soon became the property of the entire Christian world. It is impossible to follow the many paths by which they penetrated from the East to the West. One of them, however, attracted the special attention of the scholars as the stage in which the Christian Legend received its final treatment before reaching the West—it was in Bulgaria of the tenth century, agitated by the dualistic heresy known as "Bogumilism." Under its influ-

ence a new subject was introduced into the Christian Legend—the struggle between the principles of good and evil, of God against the devil, Satanael. The arena for this struggle, which resulted in the victory of evil, was the creation of the world. "Falsehood" remained on earth while "Truth" soared to Heaven. In the West this heresy revived interest in the Legend, and from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries in different parts of Europe—Italy, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and even in England—there were similar sects under different names.

The influence of the Christian Legend was very strong in the West, and its result was important. The Christian themes captured the people's imagination, and the old epic tales and songs were gradually replaced by new Christian poetry. But while supplanting the ancient folklore, Christianity did not succeed in destroying the sources of popular imagination. The people soon assimilated this new material, and on the basis of the Eastern legend independent works of medieval Christian literature and art were created. Some of these works far surpassed those of the East that had inspired them. Thus Dante made use of the "Pilgrimage of the Holy Virgin through the Infernal Regions" for his *Divine Comedy*. Yet as the centuries passed the absolute dominance of Christian thought and Christian civilization in Europe came to an end. Having taken from this civilization all it had to give, the West made further progress, secularizing its literature. The medieval legend, which had obliterated in the memory of the people the ancient epic, in its turn lost its power and retired into oblivion under the dominance of numerous new influences. To understand that period a scholar must search the now forgotten records of the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, for the people cannot supply him with any data of that bygone epoch.

In order to obtain a clear idea of the great difference existing in this respect between Russia and the West, one must remember that in Russia folklore still serves as a living source for the study of both the pre-Christian and the medieval Christian world outlook of the masses. This is enough to demonstrate clearly that the Christian idea could not have exerted in Russia as deep an influence as it did over the spirit of the European nations. As for the subsequent views which had replaced the medieval one in the West,

they reached the Russian masses too late and therefore could play no part in the formation of popular ideas.

The early historians of literature usually characterized the ancient period in Russian letters as an epoch in which Byzantine ascetic ideas predominated exclusively. This view may be true concerning the educated minority which depended entirely on the religious literature adopted from Byzantium and the Balkans, but the influence this literature exerted over popular poetry during the ancient period was insignificant and gained ground only in later days.

The masses were slow in assimilating even formal Christianity, and equally slow in revealing any influence of the Christian Legend in their folklore. The ancient source of popular art had not been exhausted, and Russian folklore spouted forth continuously up to the time when scientists were prepared to record its creations. The recording of the national epos, which had already been undertaken in Western Europe under Charlemagne, did not begin in Russia in a systematic fashion until the middle of the nineteenth century, but since then has continued up to recent days.

At present all the students of the Russian epos agree that it was not created in the earlier period and preserved intact until our day, as was previously believed, but that it remained alive and subject to change during the entire length of Russian history. In fact, not only the development of old subjects, but the creation of new ones as well continued even recently. This was the task of the "merry guild of jesters" which, notwithstanding severe persecution during the reign of the pious Tsar Alexis, discharged it successfully until the time of Peter the Great.

From the earliest days the church never ceased condemning popular art and its representatives. But it had no moral means sufficient to teach the people a new conception of the world or to direct the activities of their imagination into a different channel. Any imaginative work was outside its sphere and was regarded by it with distrust. From this point of view the Christian Legend and pagan folklore were equally censured by the church. The Russian church inherited this attitude from the same source that was responsible for the Bogumilist variations of the Christian Legend. From the earliest days of Christianity the censors prohibited the

use of the apocryphal books in church. There existed in Bulgaria a complete list of these forbidden books, which at the end of the fourteenth century was accepted by the Russian theological literature. The greater part of the books on this list had been brought previously to Russia in Serbian and Bulgarian translations. At a later period these books began to exercise considerable influence over the minds of the people, in spite of the ban imposed by the church. But in the fourteenth century the masses were still not sufficiently prepared to interest themselves in the Christian Legend. The inadequate dissemination of Christian ideas was a much more powerful protection against the influence of Christian poetry than an unyielding interdiction. The masses enjoyed listening to jesters, abandoned themselves to "diabolic" pagan amusements, and remained deaf both to preaching in church and to the Christian Legend. "When it is time to attend church," says a preacher in one of the records written about 1400, "we yawn, and stretch, and scratch ourselves, take a nap, then say: It is cold, or it rains. . . . But when the dancers, or musicians, or other players invite us to play or join the assembly of idolaters, we rush joyfully . . . and stand there gaping throughout the day, though there be no roof or shelter from rain and storm. We bear all this gladly, while destroying the soul by the spectacle. The church has a roof and is protected from the wind—and yet from sheer laziness no one wants to attend and be taught."

Because of these conditions the Christian Legend could not, during the early period of Russian literature, become the subject of independent poetical adaptation. But gradually and slowly circumstances changed, and there appeared in Russia if not readers then at least attentive listeners to the Christian Legend. Apparently, in many cases the clergy themselves were responsible for its propagation, and the ecclesiastical authorities severely blamed the ignorant village priests who in their simple-heartedness provided the people with the interdicted books instead of the Holy Scriptures. But the masses were able to learn the contents of the Legend without the assistance of the rural clergy, for it was told them in simple language by the people of their own class. There is an English story relating to a preacher who, unable to make the people listen to his sermons, disguised himself as a minstrel and

sang at the crossroads. The people, hearing the familiar tunes, came in crowds and unwittingly listened to sacred songs cloaked in popular garb. Something like this also happened in Russia, only the minstrels were not priests in disguise, but pious pilgrims sprung from the people.

From early days in Russia pilgrimage was a profession for those in need of public charity. Being under the special protection of the church, mendicant pilgrims were the natural intermediaries between the church and the people. Knowing and sharing the taste of the masses, they were able to adapt to this taste all the suitable religious material. Thus during the second phase in the development of popular literature—the transition from epic poetry and pagan song to the Christian Legend—the pilgrims played the part which previously had been performed by the jesters. Sacred verse began to compete with the “songs of olden days,” while the ancient apocrypha, prohibited by the church, supplied it with an inexhaustible source of material. Because of illiteracy and the absence of books, rhythmic verse was the sole possible means of transmitting and fixing anything in the minds of the people, and only after having been put into verse did the Legend become the property of the masses.

When did the Russian people assimilate the poetical themes of the medieval Christian Legend? All signs indicate that it took place rather late and that the process of this assimilation went hand in hand with the growth of religious formalism and the gradual nationalization of the faith. The first period during which sacred verse flourished corresponded to that of the exaltation in national piety, and subsequently it shared the fate of Russian ritualism.<sup>2</sup>

The Bulgarian and Serbian translations of the Christian Legend imported into Russia in book form remained untouched on the bookshelves of the monastic libraries, up to the end of the fifteenth century. They were known to but a few people, chiefly from among the hierarchs of the church. A movement headed by the clergy themselves brought these treasures of Christian poetry to the knowledge of the masses during the sixteenth century, but from the beginning the authorities and some of the best educated people of the time had serious misgivings about the interest they evoked.

<sup>2</sup> For the course of Russia's religious development, see Part I.—ED.



Prince Kurbsky<sup>3</sup> complained that the "self-styled teachers of the present age" exercised themselves in reading "Bulgarian fables," and praised them and preferred them to the great teachers of the church. In recalling the accusations of Maximus and the apprehension expressed in *The Hundred Chapters*,<sup>4</sup> we can see clearly the general setting of tottering ancient customs in which the Christian apocrypha gained its first victory. The very fact that new and special precautions had to be taken against this danger proves that it was increasing. The Bulgarian list of forbidden books of the fourteenth century was rewritten in Russian in the form of a tract *On True and False Books*, and was widely distributed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. "A great number of copies," remarks Prof. A. N. Pypin, "serves to show that at that time the books forbidden by the tract had a wide circulation. Indeed, the largest number of the 'false' books is known to us in manuscripts belonging to that period."

The fate of Christian poetry in Russia was determined by its belated assimilation, and because of this it could not render the same service to Russian literature that it did to that of medieval Europe. At the time when it first spread to the masses, the more educated representatives of church and society assumed a negative and critical attitude towards it, and thus it could never become an inspiration to the artistic genius of cultured people, whose spiritual interests were shortly to be directed into a different channel. Consequently the medieval Legend became the exclusive property of those who had preserved the religious ideals of the sixteenth century and were hostile to new literary influences. In other words, the sacred verse was adopted only by the lower classes and did not inspire any outstanding talents or produce any great works of art. Its further development took place chiefly among the Schismatics, because its favorite subjects were in harmony with the prevailing mood of the Old Ritualists. The Last Judgment and eternal agony, renunciation of the world, poverty, and pilgrimage in the name of

<sup>3</sup> Russian statesman and writer of the sixteenth century, a contemporary of Ivan the Terrible.—Ed.

<sup>4</sup> Maximus was a Greek theologian of the sixteenth century who accused Russian churchmen of deviation from correct Orthodox practices. *The Hundred Chapters* was a series of regulations passed by a Russian church council convoked in 1551 for the purpose of reforming the church. See Part I, chapters 1 and 3.—Ed.

Christ, received now a new treatment in accordance with the ideas of the radical Schismatic trends. From the Schism the sacred verse was transmitted to the kindred Sectarians—the Khlysty and the Skoptsy. The Evangelical and Spiritual Christians of the later period (i. e., the middle of the eighteenth century) on the contrary, remained alien to the ancient sacred verse; their songs possessed a modern, Protestant character, and in most cases were either translated or adapted from the German. As for the people who remained outside of the Schism and Sectarianism, they continued to preserve the heritage of ancient literature in the form it had acquired during the seventeenth century up to the time when this tradition was replaced by other religious and cultural influences.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, with the exception of the Schismatics and some Sectarians, the acceptance of the Christian Legend had no lasting effect on the imagination of the people. Even at its height sacred poetry was not sufficiently forceful to replace entirely in their minds the former epical and pagan traditions. The masses liked to listen to the mendicant pilgrims, but they still enjoyed the “jolly lads”—the jesters. Both these arts drew closer together when the pilgrims, having lost the support of the church, and the jesters, having ceased to be the minstrels at the court feasts, became equally dependent on public charity. To satisfy the demands of the people the epic songs of the jesters and the sacred verse of the pilgrims had to exist side by side. When the government finally suppressed the jesters, the pilgrims, or “Elders,” became their heirs. On occasion they donned the jesters’ garb and sang at wedding feasts. From the close proximity of the pilgrims’ Christian repertory with the pagan one of the jesters there resulted a mutual influence. That is why the popular hero Ilia of Murom became a saint and the sponsor of the pilgrims, while the wise King Solomon was transformed into a hero of the *byliny*.<sup>6</sup> For the same reason Vasily Buslaev, a favorite hero with the jesters, began his career by performing valiant deeds in the epic style, then, becoming a pilgrim, went to the Holy Land to atone for his sins, but finally, unable to stand the test, ended his life in a jester’s prank. The medieval Legend had imbued the national epos with Christian poetic ideas, but some-

<sup>5</sup> For details on Russian Schismatics and Sectarians, see Part I, chapters 3–6.—ED.

<sup>6</sup> *Bylina* is the Russian name for an epic folk song.—ED.

times the Legend in its turn acquired a popular form. Their peaceful coexistence gives the best illustration of the belated and incomplete influence which Christian literature exerted over the thought of the people.

This type of influence facilitated the reaction against it. The clergy were unable to instill the principles of Christian asceticism into the minds of the masses, whose penitent mood soon changed into one of mirth, and moralizing parables were easily transformed into parodies. During the same centuries in which Russian folklore mastered the themes of the Christian Legend, it also became conversant with the famous story of the reveler so contrary to the principal axioms of Christian ethics.

There was no subject on which both the Legend and the old didactic literature were more outspoken than the condemnation of the drunkard. According to the Legend, wine was derived from an infernal root sown in the Garden of Eden by the devil. Adam and Eve partook of the grape of the vine, transgressing the Lord's commandment. In the homilies intoxication was cited as the origin of all other sins, and the intemperate were threatened with eternal punishment. It was in support of this view that the famous Russian epic of "Woe-Misfortune" was written, in which all the misfortunes of the hero arose from his disobeying the parental admonitions and "taking to intoxicating drinks." After many wanderings the hero found refuge from grief in a monastery—where the ancient Russian reader sought it himself. Such was the Byzantine strain that gradually penetrated even the world outlook of the masses. Now we shall compare it to the humorous Western story, which gained favor with the Russian people and which in Russia acquired a particularly pointed character. In France its hero was a peasant, in Germany a miller, while the Russian version made him a drunkard, thus substituting an element of moral bravado for that of social protest. "Once upon a time there was a reveler," so ran the Russian version, "who during all his life drank copiously, praising God at every drink." After his death the reveler appeared at the gate of Paradise and started arguing with the saints. St. Peter was the first to ask who was knocking at the gate. "I am a sinner, a reveler," answered the hero; "I want to dwell with you in Paradise." "No revelers are admitted here," said the Apostle. "And who

art thou?" inquired the reveler, and on learning that it was St. Peter he continued: "And dost thou remember, Peter, how thou didst deny Christ? Why art thou living in Paradise?" Peter retired in humiliation. The same fate befell the Apostle Paul, Kings David and Solomon, and St. Nicholas, while to John the Evangelist the reveler said: "Thou with Luke didst write in the Gospel, Love each other; yet thou hatest the newcomer. John the Evangelist, either thou must cut off thy arm or disavow thy words." Whereupon John replied: "Reveler, thou art our man," and led him into Paradise. There the reveler unceremoniously occupied the best quarters and provoked the insulted saints: "Holy Fathers, you do not know even how to talk to a reveler, what would you do with a sober man?" This story was so widely read that in the seventeenth century its title was included in the list of forbidden books.

Lusty laughter and jokes found their way readily into the folklore. Though only slightly touched with culture, it bore the germ of truthfulness and realism characteristic of Russian art in its developed state. Among the intellectuals of those days the cultural influence of religion was rather stronger. Russian art had to pass through a series of conventional phases before it acquired the right to draw its material directly from life. During the earliest phase, that inspired by Byzantium, laughter and jokes had no place. "Laughter is not creative, neither is it preservative," said an ancient Russian moralist, "but devastating and subversive to creation; it grieves instead of pleasing the Holy Ghost, and destroys the body; it turns away virtue, for it does not consider death and eternal punishment. O Lord, deprive me of laughter and grant me lamentation and tears." Thus the ancient moralist saw no educational value in mirth, but regarded it as a deplorable temptation.

The history of ancient Russian fiction gives us the best account of the manner in which the intellectuals emerged from this phase, and what was adopted in its stead. The belles-lettres of this epoch are mostly translations, but in the selection of the originals and the gradual replacing of favorite subjects we have nevertheless a fair indication of the change in the readers' taste and the trend of their intellectual demands.

The material for the secular or "entertaining" books was again supplied by the more cultured countries. The South Slavonic

manuscripts, imported into Russia from Bulgaria and Serbia in the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, awaited the Russian reader. They brought to that remote country the fruits of the lively literary intercourse which existed between the East and the West during the time of the Crusades. The ancient tales of India, the life of Buddha, the Trojan War, the campaigns of Alexander of Macedon, the valiant deeds of Digenis, the Byzantine knight, all these subjects previously developed by Byzantine literature now, with the assistance of Latin translations, became the property of Western nations. Somewhat later, having been translated into South Slavonic, they reached Russia, but here their fate, like that of the Christian Legend, was different from what it had been in Western Europe. The West mastered the new narrative material in active fashion, the Byzantine texts served as a starting point for numerous adaptations and gave birth to independent poetic creations. The sequels to the Byzantine tales in the West were the chivalrous novels and Italian *novelle*. What part did these narratives play in Russia?

Of course there existed also in ancient Russia an interest in profane or entertaining reading material, and it leaned, as in Europe, towards the fabulous, the fantastic, and the fairy-like—that which was “wondrous to listen to.” But it was only under the guise of moralizing works that the Russian reader could obtain such material. The literature imported from the Slavonic South satisfied both these requirements. In its literary forms it reproduced the types which had created the novel and the *novella* in the West. Either they were short stories, occasionally frivolous, but having always in conclusion a Christian moral, and usually connected one to another by some purely artificial device or very simple plot—such for the most part were the ancient dialogues, in which interlocutors vied in story-telling, or entertained each other with riddles and parables—or they were tales of wonderful lands and people, connected with a recital of valiant deeds of some legendary or semi-legendary hero. In Russia the story could not be liberated from its moral task and so was accepted only in the form of a moralizing parable, while the tales of heroic deeds were obliged to omit the romantic element and assume a Christian character. Thus Alexander of Macedon—a knight, according to the Western tradi-

tion—in the Slavonic version of the fifteenth century began to grieve over the futility of all worldly matters, while later, in the Serbian account of *Alexandria*, he definitely acquired the character of a Christian hero, worshiping one true God and destroying the pagan temples. Under the Slavonic influence a like transformation befell Digenis, the hero of the Byzantine epic. All these adaptations changed the Byzantine original in quite an opposite direction from its development in the West. Instead of the lyric and romantic elements gathering strength, even any hints at sentiment that still existed in the Greek prototype were eliminated from the Slavonic manuscripts before they reached Russia. The Russian people themselves never attempted to make any changes.

In fact even the small number of secular works were for a long time contraband in the country. The ascetic Byzantine influence was preserved among the outstanding members of Russian society up to the end of the seventeenth century. In 1676, at the direct "wish and command" of Tsar Alexis, a translation was made of *The Great Mirror*, a voluminous work composed by the Jesuits from material of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which met with the approval of both antagonistic parties of Russian intellectuals—the old Orthodox and the new "Polish-Latin." This symposium contained stories intended to serve as illustrations for preachers, but instead became a favorite work with the general public. Notwithstanding its great bulk, many manuscript copies were circulated, and in the course of the same century it was ready for the printing press. Patriarch Adrian adopted some of the *Mirror* when compiling his book of prayers for the dead (*sinodik*), while during the eighteenth century a number of its stories became the property of the masses, and frequently served to revive in the minds of the people the contents of the earlier Russian narrative literature—that of the Christian Legend.

The tales in *The Great Mirror* resembled these earlier works, for in them worldly pleasures, wine and song, dances and finery, were also strongly condemned, and thoughts were concentrated on salvation. But this new symposium pictured the torments of the sinners with new, awe-inspiring details, coloring them vividly in order to impress the imagination of the faithful. A slanderer continually chewed and spat out his tongue, as red-hot as molten iron,

which hung to the floor and perpetually grew again. A woman full of sin sat on a fierce dragon; on either side two demons were beating her with chains of fire, while scorpions and lizards, dogs and mice were gnawing and biting her ears and brain, arms and legs. Toads jumped out of the mouth of anyone who confessed his sins, but reëntered it if a single sin was hidden. In a word, threats abounded. The church alone could save a sinner from inevitable perdition. A year of its prayers counted for a thousand years of torments, while thirty successive masses could save a sinner from hell. Thus purely Catholic ideas, adorned by the fruitful imagination of Loyola's *Exercises*, reached the conscience of the Russian faithful.

The fate of *The Great Mirror* was similar to that of the Christian apocrypha. In the eighteenth century it likewise became the exclusive property of the Schism, exerting its influence chiefly in the popular form of sacred verse. The *Mirror* never was printed, because soon after its first appearance in manuscript the mood of the intellectuals underwent a change. This change came at the end of the seventeenth century.

The new mood of those who could read became apparent even in the titles employed by the translators or transcribers to advertise the contents of their works. "This narrative is very beneficial to the salvation of the soul," was the usual recommendation for the ancient texts, but now in addition to them there appeared works of a quite different type, which gradually took their place. The readers were bored by moralizing literature and sought entertaining books.

The time was then ripe for the secularization of literature, and again the West provided the material. Having missed the opportunity of developing an independent novel and story, the Russian readers acquired both in their completed forms from European works; again not directly but translated into a language more familiar to them. The part of intermediary, which in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had been played by the Balkans for the Byzantine narrative, was now assumed, for the Western chivalrous novel and story, by Poland. Due to this new source, the style of the entertaining books in Russia was radically changed during the last part of the seventeenth century. The profane element of

the narrative appeared without moral covering, and the story was now no longer a mere canvas for the free weaving of adventures and parables. Presently there arose a direct interest in the plot, and the former dialogues were replaced by long tales with complicated subject matter and artful intrigues. One after another there emerged upon the stage the "pleasant" and "amiable" stories of glorious kings, valiant knights, and beautiful princesses. At first the reader was interested mostly in the hero's valiant deeds, but little by little the romantic side attracted his attention, and love, which formerly had passed unnoticed, scarcely finding a way into the Russian version, began coming to the fore, and eventually was the chief interest of the story. Thus the erotic element appeared in Russian narrative literature.

The introduction of this love element was momentous, for it denoted the admission of realism into literature and of idealism into life, both of which helped to ennoble human relations. Contrary to the usual judgment, it can be asserted that it was exactly at this time that Russian literature began to be sentimental. The radical change, which in the West had been foreshadowed by Dante and achieved by Petrarch, took place in Russia under Peter the Great.

It was at that time that Russian literature finally started upon its independent development. The same source which stimulated a lively interest on the part of the readers also supplied the author with inspiration. Original Russian fiction and poetry were at last born.

The favorite hero of the original Russian stories in Peter's time was typical of sentimental literature. Usually it was a Russian sent abroad to study. There the hero, a sailor or a valiant cavalier, fell in love with some beautiful damsel or princess, pined for love and even wrote love poems. At the end, after a series of obstacles, he was either happily united with the object of his passion or met a tragic death. Thus the tales of Peter's time show both the source from which many a Russian reader acquired his sentiments and the means by which these sentiments were circulated. The source was supplied by impressions gained from traveling abroad, and original or translated fiction was the means for their propagation. Having familiarized himself with feelings that were new to him



in the world of fiction, the reader endeavored to apply them to practice. The imaginary sufferings of the heart, combined with actual experience, resulted in an increased sensitiveness, and thus the Russians acquired a taste for subtle emotions of which their fathers and grandfathers had been quite unaware. Through the medium of sentimental stories and love lyrics, idealism found a place in their heart.

The secularization of literature was one of the outward manifestations indicating the appearance in Russian society of a new group, standing outside the old social classes—the intelligentsia. Before long the pick of this intelligentsia, the first in Russian history, received a regular school education and began to advance rapidly along the newly opened path. They possessed a knowledge of languages, particularly French, so all the treasures of foreign literature were accessible to them. By the end of the eighteenth century, in St. Petersburg, French was the familiar language in the households of the nobility, who by preference read foreign books. Their children were educated at home by foreign tutors, whereas the schools were filled by the children of the middle class. Russian books were written or translations made chiefly by the people of the latter class, but they were read by the provincial nobility, the city middle class, the office clerks, the clergy, the literate among the soldiery, the peasantry, and the domestic servants. These new categories of readers, whose growth was greatly stimulated by Peter's reform,<sup>7</sup> required a special literature, for which purveyors were soon found. The result was that in Russia there appeared two cultural strata—the educated and the merely literate. At the beginning of the century they still were very close together, but by the end of it they had grown far apart. The upper stratum, which obtained the books from abroad, pursued every new literary trend of the West. Presently we shall examine the type of these trends, and we shall discover why the vast circle of merely literate people did not adopt the new literary style, but first we must study the literature intended for popular or, as it was called, the "bourgeois" or "mean" taste. Subsequently the simplicity of this taste exerted a great influence in the transformation of the artificial style of "bookmen" and the court circles into a more natural one. Without this transi-

<sup>7</sup> The reference here is to Peter the Great's attempt at Russia's westernization.—ED.

tion, literature could never have reached the top of the national creative power or have become a real social force. Only through the close relation of these two strata, temporarily divided because of a too rapid tempo in the development of the adopted culture, could the author find his reader and the reader the author, and together, through the medium of a more frequent interaction, create the modern literary language.

Upon what did the semi-educated and the wholly uneducated Russian readers thrive until the time of the reunion, i. e., approximately until the twenties of the nineteenth century? Of course at first they assimilated the legacy of the culture in existence before Peter's time, but they were not willing to accept it passively or mechanically, without contributing of their own to every type of ancient literature. The average reader of the eighteenth century continued to enjoy religious books, but at the same time he demanded of them a certain emotion as well as benefit to his soul. This is why the *Life of Alexis, Man of God* became one of the favorite books, and was widely circulated. Sacred verse also assumed a new form, that of the psalms and chants using the syllabic verse imported into Russia from Poland by way of Kiev. All these were, however, mere survivals of the seventeenth century, while the predominating books in the eighteenth century were of a profane type. Here we meet primarily with various attempts to use the ancient folklore. Fairy tales, *byliny*, and particularly the folk songs, which up to this time were only oral, were now put into manuscript form and later were printed. The process was the reverse of that which had taken place in ancient Russia. The texts of the books were circulated then by word of mouth in the form of verse, while at this later time, on the contrary, oral literature, with the help of the written word and the printing press, was recorded for the benefit of the new readers. Again the old material suffered a change under the influence of the new literary style, and, what was even more significant, it was now supplemented by independent original works. It was precisely at this time that the dividing line between the real folk songs and those recently composed was obliterated, and in the song books of the latter part of the eighteenth century folk songs were mixed in with the "most modern sentimental" ones. But the translated love lyrics and novels

enjoyed the greatest success among the burghers. Up to the end of the eighteenth century old stories of adventure and chivalry were being diligently copied in Russia. So great was the sale of these novels at the end of the century that they were printed in several editions which, however, did not prevent their being copied by hand. The extraordinary commercial success of this literature and the durability of its popularity, which extended far into the nineteenth century, demonstrate the slowness of the progress made by the intellectuals in their efforts to raise the reading masses to the upper level of culture.

To a considerable extent this slowness can be explained by the very type of literary creations in Russia, which prevailed during the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth centuries. It was a period when letters were dominated by an artificial standard borrowed from abroad, and when an equally artificial language far removed from the spoken Russian was used. Much time had to elapse before literature could adopt the method of describing what one sees and of writing as one speaks. Throughout the entire eighteenth century the conventional contents and artificial form remained the outstanding characteristics of Russian literature, which explains why its real classical period was still far in the future.

Of course pseudo-classicism and the undeveloped literary language were only the symptoms, not the causes that arrested progress in literature. The actual reasons lay deeper and were due to the social conditions existing in those days. In Russia, as in the West, pseudo-classicism satisfied the demands of a small social stratum, and prevailed only until the time when the reading public of a different class and having different interests and demands began to show an active interest in literature. In the West the theory of pseudo-classicism was formed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries under the immediate influence of the court and nobility, and was designed to create a literature for the "well-bred" people, who despised *la racaille*, *la vile multitude*. Therefore it was quite natural that at the beginning of the eighteenth century in Russia likewise the pseudo-classical theory was best suited to satisfy the demands of a literature which, according to Tredia-

kovsky,<sup>8</sup> had to use "the language of the courtiers and illustrious noblemen." But at court, during the first half of the century, literature was tolerated rather as an indispensable attribute of courtly magnificence than appreciated for its content. It was this specific requirement that was best satisfied by the conventional forms of the classical tragedies and odes.

Already at this early period literature in its subject matter was predominantly sentimental, and this element was emphasized during the second part of the century, when there appeared readers and an audience from the small nobility and the bourgeois class. By that time the demand for what was natural and a greater concern for *la simple humanité souffrante* were much spoken of in French literature. The Russians, who championed "bourgeois tastes," could again take up the banner that had been passed to them from the West. But they did not proceed very far either in their social or their literary protest, and limited themselves to a mere criticism of the extremes in Russian pseudo-classicism. After some concessions had been made to the new tastes, the latter continued to exist peacefully along with the ever increasing sentimental trend.

Another sign of limited influence exerted by intellectual literature over life during the eighteenth century was the undeveloped state of the literary language. This the contemporaries regarded as the cause of the weakness in literature, and they hastened to remedy the situation by publishing grammars, dictionaries, and their own samples of literary works. Actually, however, the undeveloped state of the literary language can be explained by the subordinate part that literature was playing in life. Literary language is not created altogether by the authors, but by the readers as well, through their mutual efforts. Only a constant and resolute demand for literary works and an equally abundant supply can produce that silent understanding between the public and the authors, that *usus* which establishes for the general public a lexical and grammatical structure of the language. This was attained in the eighteenth century by the "bourgeois" literature, and it resulted

<sup>8</sup> Russian writer of the eighteenth century (1703-69) who devoted much attention to problems of literary theory and language.—Ed.

in the gradual development of a popular literary language, while the serious writers were still groping for their public and inventing fictitious rules for literary style. Here a gradual change took place as the type of readers and their tastes became clear. The reading public was unsophisticated and its prevailing mood sentimental, so the literary style had to develop in the same directions.

This new literary language, of course, was not the first one to appear in Russia. Long before that, ancient Russia had established a language of its own, which was used in church literature. In the course of centuries the Church Slavonic succeeded to a certain extent in adapting itself to the national Russian speech, and therefore was already quite remote from its Slavonic prototype of the days of Cyril and Methodius.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless it remained very conventional and pedantic in form, and in time the gulf between it and colloquial Russian speech widened, rendering this language unintelligible not only to the masses alone. But through long habit people became reconciled to it, and in its very obscurity a quality was found conforming to the dignity and importance of the subjects on which it was deemed permissible to write in this language.

During the Moscow period,<sup>10</sup> due to the state's requirements, there was gradually modeled a simple and comprehensible style for writing official documents and, as was to be expected, it penetrated into other branches of letters outside the church's sphere. Already in the early part of the sixteenth century the tendency of common speech and official language to influence the Church Slavonic used in the books was noticed and condemned by some contemporary scholars. This influence undoubtedly continued to grow in the course of the seventeenth century until further development in that direction was interrupted by Peter's reform. One of the effects of that reform was to deprive the language used by the educated Russians of any firmly established foundation.

Along with new impressions acquired from abroad, foreign forms of expression and foreign terminology were accepted without discrimination. There followed a long period during which the cultured Russians, and in particular the writers, had recourse

<sup>9</sup> Greek missionaries of the ninth century, the inventors of the Slavonic alphabet.—Ed.

<sup>10</sup> From the middle of the fifteenth to the end of the seventeenth centuries.—Ed.

preferably to foreign languages in order to find more precise and subtle expression for their ideas. The sedate and pompous style of the Moscow period was now replaced by spasmodic efforts to express in words the outpourings of new emotions and thoughts. The veil of monotony, spread by the conventional style over literature of the seventeenth century, disappeared as if by magic. Every writer left to his own devices acquired individual characteristics, and many attempts were made—some serious and some ineffectual or even comic—to create a new Russian tongue.

While this crisis was taking place in the language of educated society, two elements of the Russian tongue remained unaffected by it and unchanged: the ancient Church Slavonic and the everyday speech of the people. The Russian theorists devoted much time to conjecturing which of the two extremes the new literary language would most resemble. The deep-rooted prejudice on the part of the intellectuals, the social origin of the majority of the none too numerous readers, and the conventional theory of pseudo-classicism, all stood in favor of the style antedating Peter. This is why Russian literary theory continued for a century to defend the rights of the Church Slavonic and to cling to its last remnants in Russian speech, in order to create a "lofty style" in literature.

Thus the Church Slavonic continued to be used in expressing lofty thoughts and treating the solemn subjects of the pseudo-classical tragedies, poems, and odes. But by the end of the eighteenth century all the elements required for reforming the literary language were already in existence, and it remained only to sanction the reform. Soon "Slavism" was definitely eliminated from the literary language and replaced by "the pleasant style which the French called *élégant*," while pedantry and scholasticism survived only at the universities and among the few old-fashioned writers.

The triumph of the new literary language at the end of the eighteenth century was due chiefly to the activity of Karamzin,<sup>11</sup> but we must not forget that its victory was the result of a long

<sup>11</sup> N. Karamzin (1766-1826), famous novelist, journalist, and historian, one of the outstanding representatives of pre-Romantic Sentimentalism in Russian literature.—ED.

chain of events. Izmailov realized this when, in 1804, he described the importance of Karamzin's reform as follows:

Conditions during the epoch in which Karamzin appeared had led Moscow and St. Petersburg society to have more refined ideas on art and life. Only the language was lacking that would correspond to the usual figure of speech in society, that could express the new ideas of the century, and would be in harmony with the new courtliness of manners. Such a language, refined and agreeable, could overcome the unforgivable prejudice held against the Russian tongue by people in society, and women in particular, by assimilating the qualities of the best European languages.

This new literary language, definitely sanctioned by Karamzin, was equally remote both from the ancient Church Slavonic and the plain popular speech. It approached the living colloquial language not of the people but that of the reading public. Without the influence of the public there could be no established literary language, and the author, even with a great talent, having nothing upon which to rely, could not prevent his literary style from rapidly becoming antiquated. Only with the successful stabilization of speech could there appear in Russia a permanent literary tradition. At the same time Russian literature acquired a basis on which it could continue to adapt itself to life.

During the eighteenth century the influence of literature on life was broadened not so much in quality as in quantity. The outstanding writers scorned "bourgeois" and "shabby" prose, and the writing of verse was considered to be the only road to immortality. For a long time the Russian authors followed the advice of Sumarokov<sup>12</sup> in his "Instruction to Those Wishing to Become Writers":

Throw away the quill you might  
Or learn to write verses day and night.

Due to this attitude towards prose the production of novels remained in the hands of half-educated compilers or, at best, of undergraduates. The readers' favorite subject continued to be

<sup>12</sup> A. Sumarokov (1717-77), the best known exponent of the pseudo-classical tragedy in eighteenth-century Russia.—Ed.

love. In 1760 Kheraskov (1733-1807)<sup>13</sup> affirmed that "novels are read to learn the art of loving," and that the reader "often marks the tenderest passages in red," and in 1802 Karamzin explained the wide circulation of novels in the same manner. But besides the love plot the interest of the public was equally attracted by the general setting in which it was presented. The reader was as ever entranced by fabulous complexities and numerous episodes which had no direct connection with the main theme of the story, and liked to have the action removed to some distant and unknown land. This taste was satisfied with the very popular type of novels of adventure and the so-called "Eastern tales," but towards the end of the century a new element was developed in the novel—moralizing, which incidentally had nothing in common with that of the ancient Russian literature. Having acquired a sentimental tinge, it soon branched out into a special type of "emotional" narrative.

At the end of the eighteenth century the demands of the bourgeois for emotional literature finally met with response from the pseudo-classical school predominant at that time. The ode gradually yielded to tragedy, the tragedy to bourgeois drama and high comedy, and the latter to emotional and light comedies. In turn each of them changed from its prototype. The old lyric poets were derided, and Derzhavin<sup>14</sup> in his works was free in his treatment of the old rules. Sumarokov's tragedy, with its strict adherence to the style of Racine, was succeeded by that of Kniazhinin (1742-91), in which more space was devoted to adventure, emotional scenes, and theatrical effects. Sumarokov himself eventually abandoned tragedy for comedy, thus passing from verse to prose and introducing on the stage real Russian characters, thereby foreshadowing Fonvizin<sup>15</sup> who, in his comedies, offered the first examples of a truly artistic treatment of contemporary Russian life. Kheraskov's emotional plays, which stirred both players and audience to the profuse shedding of tears, were frequently acted in the Russian theaters and received great acclaim. Comic opera

<sup>13</sup> Another eighteenth-century Russian playwright.—Ed.

<sup>14</sup> G. Derzhavin (1743-1816), the greatest Russian poet before Pushkin.—Ed.

<sup>15</sup> D. Fonvizin (1745-92), the most outstanding Russian playwright before Griboedov and Gogol.—Ed.



caused a sensation. The light comedy tended to develop into the farcical plays, vaudevilles, which enjoyed a tremendous success. But it was the fable which eventually rose to the heights of a true national type.

## II

### THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

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At the beginning of the nineteenth century pseudo-classicism still preserved its authority in the textbooks of poetry, but absolutely lost its former power of inspiring the court and metropolitan literature, and was openly replaced by Sentimentalism, whose triumph was a step, though not a conclusive one, towards a reconciliation between literature and life. Its influence over the public was only in the sphere of fanciful emotions, for a Chinese wall still separated it from the world of reality. The emotions raised by the reading of novels were only in rare cases apparent in real life, and even the leaders of emotionalism agreed that the fantastic and the real worlds were as far apart as the poles. In the first they could be dreamers and poets, while in the second they continued to be officials and advocates of serfdom. At the formal inauguration of the Sentimental period, in 1796, Karamzin expressed this idea as follows:

Only that which does not exist in reality is beautiful, said Jean Jacques Rousseau. What does it matter? If the beautiful, like a light shadow, perpetually escapes us, we must at least retain it in our imagination, and follow it into the world of dreams, while deceiving ourselves and those worthy to be deceived. A poet has two lives, two worlds. If he is bored and dissatisfied with reality, he departs to the land of imagination and lives there in Paradise, according to his desires and his heart's content, like a pious Mohammedan with his seven houris.

Thirteen years later, at the close of the Sentimental period (1810), the same remarks were repeated by Zhukovsky.<sup>1</sup> "What does the

<sup>1</sup> V. Zhukovsky (1783-1852), one of the greatest Russian poets of the early nineteenth century, particularly known for his translations from Western European pre-romantic and romantic poetry.—ED.

poet, whose influence is solely over the imagination, care if reason discovers that that which is tangible is quite different from that presented by illusion?"

The young generation, shedding tears over *Poor Liza* and *Marie's Holt*,<sup>2</sup> were no longer satisfied with these arguments. Having lived through worse times, the old leaders knew well that life and fiction were not the same. They were accustomed to the humble position assigned to the influence of books in the eighteenth century. But the youth of the time of Alexander I grew up in more favorable surroundings. They took the sweet dreams of sentimental poets for granted, and Sentimentalism was transformed from a pleasant recreation for adults into an elementary school of conventional idealism for youth.

With maturity they needed variety in their reading, and the more gifted among the young generation undertook to provide this new literature. The old popular books were rapidly passed down to the lower levels of society. Sumarokov, who derided *Bova* and *Peter of the Golden Keys*<sup>3</sup> as books for clerks, was in turn ridiculed by Karamzin, whose *Poor Liza* subsequently also became the subject of derision. For the contemporaries, some of the most popular novels of the eighteenth century now became only reminiscences of a childhood spent in the remote provinces. According to the records of 1806-08, "more novels are read and create a greater impression in the provinces than in the cities." It was in 1814 that the first feeble effort was made at writing an original, realistic novel—*The Russian Gil Blas*, by Basil Narezhny (1780-1825), a predecessor of Gogol. But as the old prejudice still existed, and the time was not yet ripe for writing in prose, literary realism at first appeared in the more familiar form of poetry.

The protest against conventional emotions and literary style assumed a rather unusual form in Russia, yet one that made it particularly accessible to the reading public. Instead of the "gentle sadness" and "pleasant melancholy feelings" favored by the older men of letters, the field of literature was suddenly invaded by an uproarious, indomitable, and youthful gaiety, which was irresponsible, but at the same time very contagious. A small group of

<sup>2</sup> Sentimental stories by Karamzin and Zhukovsky, respectively.—Ed.

<sup>3</sup> Two popular tales of the eighteenth century.—Ed.

students from the Lyceum in Tsarskoe Selo, among whom was Pushkin (1799-1837), chose intimate feasts and revels, secrets of the heart, and love adventures as themes for their poetry. This daring innovation was introduced from the classroom to society, and soon mess songs and the cult of Bacchus and Venus won places of importance in literature. The new subjects, fresh, young, and mirthful, were accepted with delight by the public and gained many new adepts for literature. The protest, which at first was instinctive, rapidly changed into one based on principle, and drew to itself new elements. As yet the fact of this new poetry was not supported by any theory, but its general meaning was clear: life took possession of literature at a time when its estrangement from reality was particularly apparent. It was in this sense that, in 1835, Belinsky <sup>4</sup> interpreted the significance of Pushkin's poetry: "The true poetry of our day is a realistic poetry, a poetry of life, a poetry of actualities." A year before, he had emphasized that "nationality is the Alpha and Omega of the new period," adding that "our nationality consists of reproducing true pictures of Russian life." Much has been written since about Pushkin, but in the estimation of the poet and of the period he had inaugurated, these definitions remain true and fundamental. The two outstanding characteristics of the great man and his time were artistic realism and the development of national art. In this sense Pushkin was the founder of what could rightfully be called the classical era of Russian literature, while everything which preceded it was but a period of preparation.

But what could be said in reply to the opinion that Pushkin in his development passed through a temporary phase of subjection to the influence of Romanticism?

Of course Romanticism was a step nearer to the reconciliation of literature and life, but with regard to Pushkin, who stood outside and above the various literary and social trends of his time, the term should be used with great caution. Pushkin did not share the current ideas on the subject. On May 25, 1825, he wrote to Viazemsky: "I have noticed here that everybody, even you, has only the haziest conception of Romanticism." In a letter to Bestuzhev, on November 30 of the same year, he again wrote: "All I

<sup>4</sup> V. Belinsky (1811-48), famous critic.—Ed.

read about Romanticism is wrong." When at last he thought he had found "true Romanticism" in Shakespeare, it was not Romanticism, but artistic realism.

True Romanticism, not as imagined by Pushkin, but as found in the history of letters, has many forms and differs with every nationality. In Russia it resembled mostly that of the Germans. French Romanticism was introduced to the Russians at a later date. As to English Romanticism, which in Russia was called Byronism and which for a time exerted a rather superficial influence on Pushkin, it had very little in common with those romantic tendencies that did not take root in the country until the middle of the eighteen-twenties, that is, only after Pushkin's art had definitely assumed its final form. The interval between the death of Sentimentalism and the birth of Romanticism was replete with emotions, more political than literary, resulting chiefly from the Napoleonic wars. Under the impact of these political impressions Russian society was divided into two groups tending towards official patriotism and revolutionism, respectively. Pushkin, though a "bard of the Decembrists,"<sup>5</sup> grew up during the years of this interregnum in literature, but to its benefit remained a stranger to both political groups. Because of this he could easily defend pure art against those who, like Ryleiev,<sup>6</sup> looked in vain for a definite idea in his poetry. When finally Romanticism became entrenched in Russian literature, it attempted to interpret Pushkin's poetry in terms of its own theory, but such an interpretation could not do full justice to Pushkin's significance in Russian letters. This is why Prince Viazemsky was right when in his introduction to Pushkin's *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (1823) he refused to place the poet's works under the category of Romanticism, which at that time had not yet acquired a definite tendency worthy of the title. "And what is a romantic style," he inquired, "and what is its relation to and difference from that of the classics? . . . Romantic literature has not yet succeeded in defining its attributes. . . . It has not yet been dissected. . . . Give it time, and the hour will strike."

<sup>5</sup> Members of a secret political society which attempted an abortive revolution in December, 1825.—Ed.

<sup>6</sup> K. Ryleiev (1797-1826), a Decembrist and one of the earlier civic poets in Russian literature.—Ed.

When the hour did strike it happened independently of Pushkin's poetry. Russian Romanticism exerted a strong influence over both the poet's younger contemporaries and the following generation; but it bore a philosophical-religious and social rather than literary character. It appeared on the social horizon as spontaneously as Pushkin's poetry, but in entirely different surroundings. From St. Petersburg the scene of action was transferred to Moscow, from the Guards regiments to the university, from Decembrists to students, from gilded youth to the gentry and the middle classes.

A study crowded with books, endless conversations on abstract subjects, ideal love, a passionate attachment to Schubert's music, Schelling's philosophy, and the fantastic works of Hoffmann, all these were characteristic of the new milieu, where art was highly valued because in it was seen the revelation of life's mystery. The poet's art, like nature, was an incarnation of the divine idea. A real poet was a sublime being, an instrument of God or of nature's creative power and, according to Friedrich Schlegel (a theorist of the Romantic school) his aim was to combine life and the ideal in a higher synthesis: "To render poetry vital and social, and to endow life and society with a poetic character." In the light of this new theory the earlier views of Sentimentalism on the difference between the two worlds, the exalted and the real, appeared totally erroneous; the very idea of restricting the realm of the ideal by conventions seemed outrageous. There existed in fact but one world—the ideal—while reality did not exist, and was only a sad phantom.

To understand the first moments in the life of the philosophical-romantic school of literature one must consult the *Mnemosyne*, a magazine published at Moscow in 1824-25, and now long since forgotten. Its editors were categorically opposed to Batteux and La Harpe, the old lawmakers in the matter of style. Also they never ceased to deride the melancholy of Zhukovsky, with his eternal "mist and moonlight," or the voluptuousness of the young officers' poetry, where it was impossible to "find a thought amongst the words." An admiration for the poems of Pushkin, whom even some of his closest friends did not understand; the echoes of French and English Romanticism along with the dominating

German influence; a cult of Homer, Shakespeare, and Goethe, coupled with a reserved attitude towards Schiller and Byron, both of whom were viewed as "one-sided" poets; a propaganda of the *Naturphilosophie*; the assertion that "actually only the ideal existed, while the material world was accidental," and that a poet was a man who lived in the ideal, even if he wrote no verse—all these traits indicated a significant crisis, which took place in Russian literature on the eve of the new reign (1825).

The general public did not like these abstruse philosophical reasonings of the new school, whose Moscow periodicals, notwithstanding Pushkin's support, shortly lost their subscribers. But the practical applications of these complex theories were intelligible to all. Polevoy <sup>7</sup> quickly mastered them, and for a number of years he held the interest of the reading public. His *Telegraph* remained the leading magazine until the eighteen-thirties, when the representatives of a new generation, Stankevich <sup>8</sup> and, following in his footsteps, Belinsky, finally emerged from the labyrinth of German metaphysics. Belinsky introduced the results of intimate discussions among his friends to the general public, and undertook the propaganda of his circle's ideas in periodicals. The "stormy Bissarion" proved to be the right man for this new task, and in his inspired interpretation the philosophical and aesthetic theories of the school attracted public attention.

Soon the journalistic struggle demonstrated to the critic, however, that the learned inventions of his friends were very far from the actual requirements of life. Having spent several years on abstractions, Belinsky "shouted for joy" on discovering around him that reality which he was seeking in the empyrean. "Reality" became his watchword, and it was easy thereafter to differentiate between its various phenomena, to approach it in a practical spirit, and to choose as a second watchword "Sociality." In this manner philosophical and historical criticism, which interested only a few, was replaced, for a long period, by social and political criticism which Russian society urgently needed, because of the absence of a free press and open political discussions. From the old concep-

<sup>7</sup> N. Polevoy (1796-1846), journalist and historian.—Ed.

<sup>8</sup> N. Stankevich (1813-40), one of the outstanding Russian intellectuals of the eighteen-thirties.—Ed.

tion only one dogma was retained in its entirety, that of the great importance of literature as a means of inspiring life with an ideal principle. Then, as it was no longer an abstract philosophical idea, but a concrete social ideal that literature was expected to propagate, the attitude towards art also changed. Once more Pushkin's pure art provoked the same opposition as that of Ryleiev. Goethe again had to surrender his place to Schiller, and French social ideas replaced German philosophy.

From this moment literary criticism became frankly social-minded, and having acknowledged the rights of realism in art, it shortly began denying art in the name of reality. The truth was that Russian critics did not want to discuss social life under the pretext of estimating the value of literary compositions, but desired to deal directly with life and be openly recognized as publicists. Forced by political considerations to confine themselves to art, they retaliated by persistently asking the question: Which is superior, art or reality? It was thus that Chernyshevsky<sup>9</sup> posed the question in his dissertation *The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality*. Bent upon the study of reality, this type of critic had neither time nor inclination to establish a philosophic basis for aesthetic values, but instead applied himself to ascertaining the social importance of Russian works of art, which was precisely what Russian society needed most at the time.

It remains to trace, in a broad outline, the fate of the secularization of Russian literature after it had reached the acme of its development in Pushkin's time. We have called this period "classical," but not in the same sense in which the word was used during the era of pseudo-classicism. In the history of every literature the term "classical" might be applied to those periods when the national creative genius attains independence and complete development. In Russia it started with Pushkin at the beginning of the twenties and lasted until the eighties and nineties of the nineteenth century, when the masters of Russian literature had either disappeared from the stage or were singing their swan songs. Although during these sixty or seventy years Russian classical litera-

<sup>9</sup> N. Chernyshevsky (1828-89), journalist, writer on social and economic problems, extremely popular with the radical youth of the eighteen-sixties and eighteen-seventies, one of the spiritual fathers of Populism.—Ed.



ture maintained some unity, yet in the course of this period there was a break in its progress, and the classical epoch was thus divided into two almost equal parts. The year 1855, when the reign of Nicholas I came to an end and that of Alexander II began, marks the moment of this break. The great political and social change which took place at that time inevitably exerted a strong influence over literature. In what did the change consist?

In 1855, eighteen years after the death of Pushkin, there appeared in the *Contemporary* articles written by N. G. Chernyshevsky. Still under the guise of literary discussion, these articles amounted to a protest, in the name of the new realistic conception, against the aestheticism of the forties, the protest of "the children against the fathers." At first the full social and political import of the movement was not apparent. But from the very beginning it was evident that the controversy extended far beyond literature and pure art, and that back of the theoretical arguments, expressed of necessity in the "language of Aesop,"<sup>10</sup> there struggled two psychological types representing two different generations, and two sociological formations corresponding to two periods in history. The "commoners" contested the predominance of the "bards of the manor" in literature, and in this struggle they were supported by youth and the reading public of the urban centers. It was not an entirely new phenomenon, for the commoners had long since occupied prominent places in literature: such outstanding men of letters as N. A. Polevoy, the son of a merchant, N. I. Nadezhdin (1804-56),<sup>11</sup> a seminary graduate, and even Belinsky belonged to this class. But in those earlier days the commoners, having no firm base of their own in the reading public, became assimilated with the literary élite, which in its majority still belonged to the only cultured class, the nobility. Pushkin wrote to Ryleiev: "Our writers come from high society, and in them aristocratic pride is mingled with the ambitions of an author; we do not like to be patronized by equals; . . . the Russian poet . . . claims esteem as a noble whose ancestry dates back six hundred years." Such a feeling was quite natural when a genealogical record could save one from the

<sup>10</sup> This was an expression commonly used in pre-revolutionary Russia to describe the peculiar euphemistic and parabolical language to which the opposition writers had to resort in order to allay the suspicions of the censor.—Ed.

<sup>11</sup> Editor and journalist.—Ed.

necessity of being subservient to a Maecenas. This is why Pushkin emphasized his own right to a high position in society. But towards the end of his life the situation began to change, and on another occasion (1834) he said: "Even now our writers who do not belong to the nobility are very scarce. Notwithstanding this their work dominates every branch of literature in our country. It is an important sign, which will bear significant results."

Pushkin was correct, and he too experienced the results of the transformation which had been taking place. The chief point of this change was that Russian literature was definitely leaving the sphere of the court and high society, while still lacking a sufficiently large public from which it could derive its support. Up to that time the writer had remained an amateur, but now the question of writing as a profession was raised. Pushkin lived during this extremely difficult period of transition, and was the last martyr to royal and court patronage. At last he thought of becoming a professional writer, and he returned repeatedly to this idea during the thirties. So in 1831 he wrote: "Ten years ago we only had a few amateurs devoting themselves to literary work. They saw in it a pleasant, honorable pastime and not as yet a branch of industry." Five years later (1836) he wrote again: "During the last twenty years Russian literature has developed into an important branch of industry. Previously it was regarded only as a polite and aristocratic occupation. In 1811, Madame de Staël said: 'In Russia a few noblemen only devote themselves to literary work.'"

Karamzin had already tried to remedy the situation by creating a new literary language that would appeal to a broader circle of readers, and he attempted to reach his public by various methods such as the publication of magazines, almanacs, and translations. But in 1798 he was forced to confess his failure: "Russian literature is like a mendicant begging for bread: there is small profit in it." True that at the beginning of the nineteenth century this situation had somewhat improved; yet he ended by abandoning the "altar of the Muses" and becoming an official historiographer, receiving his support from the state. The position of Pushkin, who completed Karamzin's reform of the language, seemed to be a more favorable one. His royalties were growing: *The Caucasian Prisoner* (1822) brought in five hundred roubles and *The Foun-*

*tain of Bakhchisarai* (1824) three thousand, the latter being such an unheard-of royalty that it stirred the entire literary world. But simultaneously there appeared on the scene a new type—the “commercial” writers, such as Thaddeus Bulgarin with his *Northern Bee* (1825) and Senkovsky with his *Library for Reading*. A keen competition arose between these commercial writers and the literary aristocracy, and for Pushkin the struggle proved to be an uneven one. In 1829 his *Poltava* was received coolly, while Bulgarin’s *Ivan Vyzhigin*, a novel of adventure written in the eighteenth-century style, ran into a second edition within a week’s time. Subsequently Pushkin, in his controversy with Bulgarin, was led to defend the old system of royal and court patronage, though stating at the same time that “lately literature in Russia has become a profitable business, and the public could afford to spend more money than His Highness So-and-so, or His Excellency So-and-so.” In an effort to win over this public, Pushkin had recourse to the methods of his opponents: he began writing prose and tried publishing magazines instead of almanacs. But the aristocratic laziness of his Moscow friends ruined the *Moscow Observer*, a periodical which was under his patronage but depended solely on the talent of Pogodin,<sup>12</sup> the son of a serf, while Pushkin’s own magazine, the *Contemporary*, was also a commercial failure. As a result Pushkin became an historiographer supported by the state.

The aristocratic writers found themselves in the same rôle as their déclassé heroes—Chatsky, Onegin, and Pechorin.<sup>13</sup> They felt out of place among their own aristocratic circles, and yet they were not familiar with the ways of broader social circles, the very existence of which was to them problematical. Consequently, the heroes of aristocratic literature relieved their feelings by taking their money and ennui abroad, where they amazed the foreigners “with the versatility of the Russian mind,” or else by retiring to their country seats where they deteriorated and gradually became idlers and “sloths,” like Tentetnikov and Oblomov.<sup>14</sup> They were brought up by foreign tutors, studied in foreign universities,

<sup>12</sup> M. Pogodin (1800–73), a well-known historian.—Ed.

<sup>13</sup> Heroes of Griboedov’s *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, and Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time*, respectively.—Ed.

<sup>14</sup> Tentetnikov, one of the characters in Gogol’s *Dead Souls*. Oblomov, the hero of Goncharov’s famous novel of the same name.—Ed.

were semi-denationalized, and even their patriotic enthusiasm and their agronomic experiments remained alien to their native country, to the welfare of which they were ready to devote their lives.

All that has been said above renders it easier to understand why the life of the nobility was the first subject to be described in Russian realistic literature, and why the aristocratic writers, while repudiating their social milieu, nevertheless continued to write for it. The first attempts to portray the life of the whole contemporary Russia, which the aristocratic authors heretofore had used only as a background for depicting the nobility, created a great impression. Gogol (1809-52), a writer who had neither aristocratic schooling nor refinement, made this attempt in his masterpiece, *Dead Souls* (1842). He became the victim of conflicting opinions on this work. The Slavophiles pronounced it the "apotheosis of Russia," their opponents called it "Russia's anathema," while Herzen,<sup>15</sup> in trying to learn the author's conception, wrote in his diary:

It is ridiculous to see in it the apotheosis, and to call it anathema is unfair. In this work there are words of reconciliation presaging hope for the future abundant and triumphant, but this does not obviate the reflection of the present in all its hideous reality.

Gogol himself, not interested in abstract debates on social ideals, watched with amazement and inner dread the impression produced by his work, and so unlike his own conception. He attempted to correct the "hideous reality" of the first part of his narrative by introducing "positive" types into the second part, but he did not succeed in making them convincing. Feeling depressed by his failure, Gogol abandoned all his friends, tried to forsake Russia, but could not escape from himself, and because of this inner conflict he paid the penalty of a tragic death. It was against his will that he was described in the history of Russian literature as the founder of the "natural school," which during this same period produced such artistic realists as Grigorovich (1822-99), Goncharov (1812-91), Turgenev, and the early Dostoevsky.

We now approach the crisis heralded by this literary progress.

<sup>15</sup> A. Herzen (1812-70), one of the earlier Russian socialists, a brilliant writer most of whose works were published in Western Europe, where he lived as a political émigré.—Ed.

It coincided with the beginning of a new reign, that of Alexander II, when at one and the same time the accumulated reserves of Russian artistic genius and a desire for social activity, heretofore suppressed, found an outlet. But here the members of the old generation met with competition from the representatives of a new social type and new ideas. In 1857, in a letter to Tolstoy, Botkin gave a very vivid and characteristic description of these literary newcomers, from the point of view of the "fathers."

Our coarse, hideous, practical life intruded upon the serene and intimate contemplations of some few people. . . . Saltykov says that they will no longer read Goethe. . . . People who before this had never held a book in their hands are now beginning to read. Inner conflicts of the soul, poetry, and an artistic element were accessible to a small minority only. To the majority of readers these things were incomprehensible. Now, when there appears a literature that is simple and accessible to every member of this majority, it is evident that they will rush at it. Our literature was caught unawares: it anticipated nothing like it.

Naturally the people accustomed to the "intimate contemplations" felt ill at ease; they were quite disconcerted by the cool and straightforward ways of the young men of a different social origin and breeding who had nothing in common with their intimate literary circles, and who, aside from their distinct political opinions, shocked them by their tastes and manners. In addition to this there was a feeling of personal resentment; the younger generation not only "showed them no respect, as they had in their youth shown the luminaries of those days," but "quite frankly ignored them, even expressing no desire to be introduced," and publicly treated them with no consideration. Of course the conflicting principles became more and more defined, when such new critics of the *Contemporary* as Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov<sup>16</sup> began to unfold and sharpen their ultra-realistic views. In the controversy that followed, the substance of these new ideas was understood in a very crude sense and was stigmatized as "Nihilism," a word popularized by Turgenev. In reality the enthusiasm aroused by

<sup>16</sup> N. Dobroliubov (1836-61), literary critic and Chernyshevsky's closest collaborator.—ED.

the new preaching, particularly among the younger generation, was created not by its negative attitude, but by the positive content of the doctrine. In the domain of literature, omitting the polemical exaggerations, this controversy still was based on the old argument: pure art as opposed to its utilitarian value, the worship of beauty against the ideal of social service, and the philosophical as opposed to a realistic approach to art.

Therefore, although the difference between the two generations—that of the forties and that of the sixties—was great it did not destroy the continuity in the development of Russian classical literature. On the contrary, the change enriched it with new content and widened its outlook. In fact, some of the best works of the “classics,” who began to write in the preceding period, appeared after the crisis. Artistic realism remained the fundamental trait of Russian literature. Already in Pushkin’s time it had passed from poetry to “humble” prose, endowing the literary language with the finest nuances for depicting nature and the human soul, while now it applied all this wealth to the artistic reproduction of Russian reality in its various manifestations. Throughout this period, beginning with *Eugene Onegin*, the social and psychological novel dominated Russian literature. As to the content, the so-called Byronic type, characteristic of the pre-reform days,<sup>17</sup> gradually disappeared from this literature. The mysterious and demoniacal heroes, irritated by the futility of their surroundings, lost their charm. Taken down from their pedestals and subjected to ridicule, they yielded to the new heroes, in many cases still fictitious, yet having a closer bond with the new Russian reality. These new heroes, unlike the old ones, did not shun or despise the trivialities of everyday life; they accepted life as it was, striving to share in it and to comply with its requirements.

True, these “positive” literary types were somewhat colorless, for reality had no time in which to provide them with the necessary colors. They could not develop their strivings in the existing political surroundings, and had to limit their activities to “petty work,” and because of this they were subsequently accused of being mere

<sup>17</sup> In speaking of the nineteenth century, Russian historians usually refer to the decades before the abolition of serfdom (1861) as the pre-reform period, and to those after the Emancipation as the post-reform period.—Ed.

"philistines." The authors themselves admitted their heroes' limitations by deliberately placing at their side women with idealistic aspirations: Olga and Stolz in Goncharov's *Oblomov*, Nadine and Molotov in Pomialovsky's <sup>18</sup> *Molotov*, Marina and Solomin in Turgenev's *Virgin Soil*. Underneath this silent acknowledgment of the impossibility of idealizing unattractive reality, there lay the claim of realism. While searching, as Gogol did, for bright phases in life, the realists were forced, also like Gogol, to portray oftener the darker influences and the negative types.

Apart from artistic realism, the writers of the eighteen-sixties and seventies found common ground in that trend of thought which became known under the name of "Populism." In this case, however, Populism had not the special significance of a social and political doctrine which it acquired shortly after. The intellectual nobility of the sixties entered the movement as a new type, cleverly nicknamed by Mikhailovsky <sup>19</sup> the "penitent nobles." The moral incentive of the nobility played a large part in the emancipation of the serfs and in the work preparatory thereto. But what they did for the peasants prior to the Emancipation could still be looked upon as mere philanthropy. Mikhailovsky attacked this philanthropic point of view towards the "little brother," demonstrating by a number of examples that philanthropy provoked in the latter only a feeling of resentment and wounded pride.

The first sincere effort of the intellectual nobility of the sixties towards the "little brother," whom heretofore they had known well only in the person of a "commoner," was the struggle to secure for every individual the right of self-determination. To render such a self-determination possible a radical change in the mode of life and established customs was necessary, and to this cause Pisarev, <sup>20</sup> a man of noble birth, devoted himself whole-heartedly. He perceived in the self-perfection of the individual the fulfillment of the intellectuals' duty towards the people, and this formed the essence of his propaganda. In the seventies, however, the question took on a different aspect. If an individual, impelled by a sense of social

<sup>18</sup> N. Pomialovsky (1835-63), one of the realistic novelists of the period.—Ed.

<sup>19</sup> N. Mikhailovsky (1842-1904), journalist and critic, one of the intellectual leaders of the Populist movement.—Ed.

<sup>20</sup> D. Pisarev (1841-68), journalist and critic, the chief exponent of the Nihilism of the eighteen-sixties.—Ed.

responsibility, had to serve the people's interest instead of his own, then his aim must be an immediate and direct connection, even a merging, with the people. Youth found itself at the crossroads of two conflicting decisions, either the development of a "critically-minded individual" according to Pisarev, or "communion with the people." The tremendous success, among the youth of the seventies, of Lavrov's <sup>21</sup> and Mikhailovsky's theories was due to their showing a way out of the dilemma, by proposing a synthesis of the two ideals, the development of the individual and the service to the people. In Lavrov's opinion, "The interests of an individual when clearly defined require that he should strive for the realization of common interests," while, on the other hand, "social aims could be attained only through individuals." Thus the "true social theory does not necessitate the subordination of the social element to the individual, or the absorption of the individual by society, but a merging of social and personal interests." Mikhailovsky supplemented this doctrine with ideas which brought the abstract theory of progress closer to the concrete problem of rendering service to the Russian people, the peasants in particular. He too placed the individual in the forefront. But it was in the Russian village commune that he found the conditions most favorable to the harmonious and many-sided development of the individual. In this he recognized a peculiarity of Russian progress. It remained only to raise the highest Russian type of development, now on the primitive level of social life, to a higher level, that of collectivist society. The effort to attain this desirable end, according to Lavrov and Mikhailovsky, was the chief task of the Russian intellectuals.

Of all the writers of the older generation it was Nekrasov <sup>22</sup> who best represented the synthesis of both types, that of the penitent nobleman with a wounded conscience, and that of the commoner with an aroused pride. Son of a poor nobleman, Nekrasov, having been repudiated by his father, shared the fate of the "commoner" writers and (1839-41) sank to the depth of St. Petersburg life. Although he succeeded later in gaining a leading position among the élite of the cultural and social circles at the capital, these earlier

<sup>21</sup> P. Lavrov (1823-1900), another of the intellectual leaders of Populism, who as a political émigré conducted socialist propaganda from Western Europe.—Ed.

<sup>22</sup> N. Nekrasov (1821-77), the most famous civic poet of the period.—Ed.



experiences left on him a mark of dual personality which was regarded by his contemporaries as a sign of hypocrisy, but which is explained by a modern critic as the inevitable result of the transitional period in which the poet was born. "He was, so to speak, a paradox in history," says Chukovsky, a student and admirer of Nekrasov's poetry, "for he belonged simultaneously to two contrasting social strata, the nobility and the commoners." Nekrasov, however, made his own choice at an early stage in his literary development. In 1848 he wrote his poem "The Fatherland" in which he described familiar sites where his forebears had spent their lives "in feasts, in senseless vanity, and in petty tyranny," and where he "was taught to suffer and to hate." He delighted in the early evidences of the noblemen's impending ruin: "The felling of trees in the park . . . the scorched fields . . . and the destruction of the deserted manor . . . where formerly the feasts were accompanied by moans of hidden suffering."

Nevertheless Nekrasov could not be called a real Populist. In his famous poem "Meditations at the Front Door" there is at the end a note of apprehension. He tries to explain the significance of the mournful folk songs, and reflects upon the fate awaiting the Russian peasants: whether their power is exhausted and they will remain forever dormant, or whether they will arise one day with new vigor to accomplish great deeds. Nekrasov sympathized with those who were fighting for the people, yet he had no belief in the immediate success of their struggle. The hope aroused by the Emancipation induced him to say (1864): "Have no fear for our dear fatherland . . . the people can endure whatever comes . . . and by their own strength they will clear a wide road for themselves." But he grieved that he was not destined to live during that wonderful time. Before his death the "bard of vengeance and sorrow" summed up his life in two sentences: "To our noble family my muse has brought no fame. I am dying as much a stranger to the people as on the day when my life began."

Turgenev (1818-83), had a much stronger bond with the "nests of nobility." Although older than Nekrasov he too was disgusted with the landowning class, personified for him in his willful and erratic mother, and so "casting off everybody and everything" he went to the West, from which he "emerged a Westerner." "No

doubt I lacked will power and the proper endurance," he wrote, "for remaining in the neighborhood." It was from "faraway" Europe that he attacked his chief enemy—serfdom—and dealt it a severe blow in his *Notes of a Sportsman* (1847-52), for which he suffered the penalty of a short exile to his country seat. From 1855 on, Turgenev definitely attached himself to the family of Viardot-Garcia, and the generations of the sixties and seventies were justified in considering him as enticed away from Russia. Turgenev was the dividing line between the "penitent noblemen" of the pre-Emancipation and those of the post-Emancipation days. The people of the sixties and particularly those of the seventies did not regard him as one of themselves, and denied that he had the right to speak for their generation. His Bazarov (*Fathers and Sons*, 1861) was received with protests. *Virgin Soil* (1876), which attempted to describe impartially the average type of the Populists, was considered an ignorant slander on intellectual youth. Turgenev did not succeed in establishing a "reconciliation with youth and the general public" by coming to Russia in February 1879. Succeeding generations have had a better appreciation of his artistic and truthful chronicles in which he described the vagaries of contemporary intellectuals during a transition period in Russian history.

Tolstoy's (1828-1910) attitude was highly original. He disagreed with the generation of the sixties, and having cursed the city and its culture as an accumulation of evil, he shook its dust off his feet and went to live in the country, in his "inaccessible literary stronghold," Iasnaia Poliana. Even before that he had repeatedly compared the vanity and corruption of town life with the simplicity and integrity of an existence undisturbed by civilization. "The coarser the people, the fewer the signs of civilization," the more free Olenin, the hero of *The Cossacks* (1852), felt on leaving the contamination of Moscow. But in the country, too, Tolstoy could not escape approaching the Populist problem from a somewhat different angle—by comparing the peasants' mode of life with that of the landowners. His *Childhood* and *Boyhood* portray the irregular, inadequate bringing up of the nobility, with its ideal of *comme il faut* and its neglect of moral principles. *The Morning of a Country Squire* demonstrates how this education affected in-

tercourse with the peasants. The attempt to heap benefits on them ends in Prince Nekhliudov's statement: "Have I seen success in my undertaking, have I seen gratitude? . . . No, I see vice, distrust, helplessness, and a wrong routine. I am wasting away the best years of my life." Olenin, because of the same failure, was prompted "to begin a new and simple life, a natural one in the open, among nature's children, spontaneous, naïve, and uncorrupted by civilization," in other words, to go to the Caucasus and join the army, as Tolstoy himself did in 1851. It was there that the Cossack Eroshka inspired the hero to a new version of Populism. "How should one live to be happy, and why was I unhappy before?" asks Olenin; and the answer is: "For myself I need nothing, so why not live for others?"

Thus already during the fifties Tolstoy had developed a psychology which later led him to attempts at simplicity of life. Having come in this mood to St. Petersburg, he, according to his *Confession*, became "doubtful of the literary faith . . . and came to the conclusion that the majority of its ministers, the writers, were immoral, evil people of no character . . . yet arrogant and conceited." In 1864 he drew a contrast between the representatives of the "idle classes" who "believed in progress," that is, the "educated nobility, merchants, and bureaucrats," and the "enemies of progress . . . the people employed in manual labor, the artisans, factory workers, peasants, agriculturists, and industrialists," and this decided Tolstoy's attitude towards literature. "I became convinced that for a Russian of common origin to acquire a taste for reading Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, it is necessary that he cease being what he is—a man of independence indulging all his human desires. . . . Our literature has never found, and never will find followers among the masses; this means that the people have not profited by the publication of books." The question whether the masses should be raised to a cultural level, or whether, on the contrary, the intellectuals should descend to their level, was solved by Tolstoy in a crudely Populist sense. In fact, he never faced the problem, for he started from the belief that the human level of the masses was higher than that of the idle classes. In accordance with this idea the repentant nobleman Tolstoy strove to imitate the plain people in order to attain spiritual self-perfection.

Dostoevsky (1821-81), another outstanding writer of the sixties and seventies, also addressed his readers from afar, though at first not like Turgenev from abroad, or like Tolstoy from the country, but from Siberia in penal servitude, which left a deep scar on his genius. His thoughts also revolved around the same fundamental problems of the period. Like Tolstoy, he found the issue in religion, by which his immediate influence was extended throughout the eighties and nineties. Being out of sympathy with the prevailing trend of the sixties, he too went abroad. Both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, like Belinsky and Herzen at an earlier date, acquired during their sojourns abroad a sceptical attitude towards European culture and a conviction of the superiority of the Russian people. But Dostoevsky, a city "commoner," could not get away from the usual habits of his set. Like the other "commoner" writers of the time, he always was in need of money (a need accentuated by his passion for gambling), and even after his marriage he remained true to the bohemian life. So it was natural that his heroes were chosen chiefly from the petty bourgeois class. Knowing little about country life, he could more easily idealize it than could Tolstoy. He entirely agreed with the Populist thesis in its simplest form. "Love the people and instead of trying to raise them to your level humble yourselves before them." After some student disturbances, Dostoevsky addressed the following reproof to youth: "Instead of leading the life of the people the young men, lacking all knowledge of it and even despising its principles, as for instance religion, go to the people not to study, but to teach them, to teach in a haughty and contemptuous manner—which is but an aristocratic whim." Dostoevsky endowed the masses with every fine quality and assigned to them the mission of giving the world a "new word," thereby solving "many of the most grievous and fatal contradictions of the West European civilization." True, when it was necessary to define more precisely the meaning of the "new word," Dostoevsky, in his famous speech on Pushkin, referred to the "pan-humanity" of the Russian people, which could be interpreted as the lack of national definitiveness. This was completed by the religious principle of Greek Orthodoxy: "The very substance of the Russian people is in Orthodoxy and its idea," and "those who do not understand it do not understand the people." At the same

time Dostoevsky insisted that his attitude towards Orthodoxy was not of a primitive character. The critics, who "accused him of an uncultured and backward belief in God, could never dream of the strength of negation through which he had passed." Dostoevsky, however, did not attempt to devise his own religion, based on ethics as Tolstoy's was; he was satisfied with Orthodoxy in its traditional form, which did not prevent him from calling himself a realist. In his *Note Book* he gave a formula of his faith, in which nationalism, based on religion, and realism were merged into one. He wanted "in a spirit of absolute realism to find man within man. This is a specifically Russian trait, and in this respect, I am, indeed, of the people (for my trend is born in the depths of popular Christianity) and though unknown to them today, I shall be known to them in the future. I am called a psychologist, which is not true; I am but a realist in the highest sense of the word, i. e., I portray the depths of the human soul." The reasoning here is very complex and involved: the depths of the soul contain religion; religion is of the people, and the analysis of the "depths" is realistic in the "highest sense." Yet it helped Dostoevsky depart from the confines of the Populist doctrine and, while choosing his material from contemporary everyday life, to invest it with elements common to all mankind.

Saltykov and Gleb Uspensky, two outstanding figures in the literature of the sixties and seventies, were far more closely associated with contemporary life. That is why they were so quickly and undeservedly forgotten, while the ethical teachings of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and the more cosmopolitan types described by them obtained wide popularity. In contrast to these latter authors, Saltykov, a nobleman and high dignitary, and Uspensky, of the middle class, were closely affiliated with the intellectual movement of the sixties and seventies. Both were under the influence of Mikhailovsky but did not, however, sacrifice their realistic art to any theory.

Saltykov (1826-89) was a contemporary of Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. He was brought up on the last works of Belinsky and experienced the strong influence of the French utopian socialists of the forties, but subsequently became a punctilious official

under several governors and thereby acquired worldly wisdom. The close observation of provincial society gave him ample material for the famous *Provincial Sketches* (1857), which at once placed him in the ranks of the outstanding realistic writers grouped around the *Contemporary*. It was in the *Contemporary* that during the sixties Saltykov published the articles in which he severely criticized Turgenev for introducing the word "Nihilist," and Goncharov for creating such a type as Volokhov in the *Precipice*, thus breaking his connection with the humanists of the forties, who had assumed a critical attitude towards the new generation. From 1868 until 1884 Saltykov, who had retired from service, was first a co-editor with Nekrasov and then (1876) became the editor of the *National Annals*, which placed him in the very center of the literary and political movements of those years. However, in his attitude towards Populism he always remained independent. There was a short period in his life during which Saltykov was inclined to be sentimental towards "our wonderful people" and "felt strongly drawn towards the Slavophiles," but he soon came to the conclusion that "when speaking of the peasants it was unnecessary to show either emotion, or humility, or melancholy." Instead of idealization, which helps to indulge in dreams, there should be knowledge of facts. With such knowledge "there would be no embraces, no all-forgiving love, yet neither would there be slaps in the face nor corporal punishment. There would be justice, and that is all that is needed at the present time." Thus Saltykov, protected by his thorough knowledge of Russian reality and his worldly scepticism, remained impervious to the Populist doctrine in its strict sense, which, however, did not prevent him from serving the people. When, in 1871, Suvorin reproved him for his "arrogant disdain of the people" Saltykov replied:

My critic does not distinguish the difference existing between the people as we know it in actual history, and the people as the depository of the idea of democracy. The former is appreciated and entitled to our sympathy in proportion to the efforts made by it to attain consciousness . . . while it is impossible not to sympathize with the latter, because it comprises the beginning and the end of every individual activity.

Here Saltykov shared the ideas of Mikhailovsky. Later his accusations were almost entirely directed at the governing class, between which and the people he drew a sharp line. The attacks against bureaucracy and serfdom prior to the Reforms were replaced afterwards in his works by tracing the selfish tendencies of the decadent class in various branches of Russian life. Simultaneously, Saltykov pointed out the appearance of a new force antagonistic to the people: the unscrupulous men of business who now replaced the ruined landowners as the exploiters of the peasants. At the end of his career Saltykov again turned his attention to the country life of the nobility which he knew so well, and produced a truly artistic chronicle of the disintegration of that class. These works of his, *The Golovlev Family* and *Old Days of Poshekhonie*, rise above the current topics of the day, and are among the lasting and substantial achievements of Russian realistic literature.

Gleb Uspensky's (1840-1902) personality brings us back to the familiar group of "commoner" writers with their poignant biographies and wealth of painful personal experiences. Uspensky had an extremely high-strung nature, and from the lowly surroundings in which he had spent his youth he emerged with an acute sense of humility.

The first recollection I have of myself was a feeling of guilt . . . always weighing down on me. . . . In church I felt guilty towards all the saints and icons. . . . In school I felt guilty towards everybody including the attendants. . . . In a word, the atmosphere in which I grew up was one filled with terrors.

This same feeling remained with him when he entered the domain of literature. Friendless, unconnected with the outstanding writers, and a stranger to all the literary circles of the time, he was thrown into "a society that had entered upon an entirely new period in its life, and was demanding from literature a complex and thoughtful work." Possessed of this sense of guilt, which later became one of responsibility, Uspensky treated his vocation in a truly ascetic spirit. He applied himself to his work devotedly and wholeheartedly, and he was justified in saying: "After my old

biography has been forgotten, the new one will be in my books as written day by day. There is nothing else in my personal life."

Uspensky was a great and real artist, but one who avoided fiction. He spoke only of what he knew and what he had personally experienced. He began by describing the very surroundings which he so wanted to forget, and portrayed the world of the petty bourgeoisie, the clerks, the small shopkeepers, and the artisans among whom his childhood and youth had been spent. *The Customs of Rasteriaev Street* (1866) brought fame to Uspensky, and through this work he was introduced into the inner circle of the journalistic world. But this was in the years (1863-68) when everything was crumbling, when the *Contemporary* had grown dull, the *Russian Word* was no longer published, and the literary workers of more or less importance had temporarily retired. "To live in the uncomfortable and confused society of writers, the majority of whom were full of affectation, seemed absolutely out of the question; therefore I went abroad," wrote Uspensky in his reminiscences. About this time Dostoevsky too left for Europe, where Turgenev had settled, and where Tolstoy had visited before retiring to the country. It was at this period that Uspensky contrived to become an orthodox Populist in the spirit of Mikhailovsky. On his return to Russia in 1877, the "real truth of life led him to the source, i. e., the peasant." But while being a "seeker after truth," he was also a realistic artist, and in him the artistic element prevailed over the preconceived ideas of the seeker. In the country he hoped at last to find human existence in an unimpaired, virginal form possessing the high qualities which Populism had ascribed to the Russian peasant. What he found was quite contrary to his expectations, and with his natural frankness Uspensky revealed the truth. He depicted the decline of the peasant commune, which also had been affected by money, since "capital, the corrupter," had found its way even there. The commune was divided between the pauperized peasants unable to maintain their economic independence and doomed to become a rural proletariat, and the village kulaks. Thus the average peasant representing the sound element in the village was threatened by pressure from both sides, and Uspensky feared that he would be unable to withstand this



pressure. Under such conditions, instead of struggling for the lofty ideal of a better future, all one could do was to attempt to preserve the dying past. In other words, Populism was losing its progressive character.

Simultaneously with the failure of the old Populism the twilight of the classical period in literature approached. But, before passing to the new phase of development, we must sum up the epoch of artistic realism that has left an immortal legacy in a number of highly original and truly national works, which have gradually become the common property of world literature. The aesthetic quality of these classical works cannot be discussed in this brief outline. It is more important for the history of Russian culture to follow the growth of their influence over the ever increasing circles of readers as a result of a more intimate connection between literature and life. In this respect the second part of the classical period, that of the eighteen-sixties and seventies, successfully realized the promises and hopes given in the forties and fifties by the "naturalistic school" of Gogol. Towards the eighties there remained no sphere of Russian life which had not been described artistically by the outstanding realistic writers who followed in the footsteps of Pushkin and Gogol. The apogee of the noblemen's culture, the poetical charm of the "nests of nobility," and the psychological types which had grown up in this hot-house atmosphere continued to be the subjects of Turgenev and Tolstoy, to whom we must now add Shenshin-Fet (1820-92), a landowner, poet, and member of the same intimate circle. But Reshetnikov (1841-71), Levitov (1835-78), and Pomialovsky, the "commoner" writers, brought into the limelight the hitherto unknown types and surroundings of the social classes most familiar to them. Curiously enough the Populist epoch acquired its knowledge of the people through the world of the petty bourgeoisie, as in the earlier works of Uspensky, who gave a truly epical description of the urban evolution after the reform.

In the immortal dramas of Ostrovsky (1823-86), a "commoner" poet and satirist, the pre- and post-reform life of the Moscow merchants is pictured and exposed. A daring innovator, he introduced unadorned realism to the stage, thereby establishing a new era in the history of the Russian theater.

To the works of Saltykov, dealing with the disintegration of the nobility after the Emancipation, must be added those of Terpigorev (1841-97), who wrote under the name of S. Atava and who in his *Impoverishment* (1880) gave a remarkable analysis of the same phenomenon of decay. Finally, the realistic writers even endeavored to portray the peasants, but were unable to master the subject fully, for they could not penetrate the "organic" and unfamiliar life of the village. Although their portrayal was exact and at times even photographic, it remained superficial. In the wake of the "commoner" writers there had to appear sooner or later those born of the people; but their hour had not yet come. The moment was not yet ripe for the appearance of a wide circle of readers among the masses. This required extensive work on the part of the village schools, which were still in a formative stage and had to face many serious obstacles on the difficult path ahead of them.

### III

## FROM CHEKHOV TO THE REVOLUTION

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THE decade that followed the seventies represented a transitional period in the social and literary history of Russia. Here again a line of demarcation was drawn by the beginning of a new reign or, to be more exact, the defeat of the political Populist movement as a result of the murder of Emperor Alexander II in 1881. But while in 1855 a tempestuous new life replaced an epoch of stagnation, this time, on the contrary, the apogee of national creative activity was succeeded by the twilight of literature. Korolenko,<sup>1</sup> the last of the champions of Populism, who sustained the sensitive conscience and the steadfast civic spirit of the seventies through these years of confusion, was a brilliant exception. Yet even his genius was tinted with the soft shades of sunset. In his works the moral asceticism of the seventies became purely humanitarian, free from illusions and dogmatic fanaticism. Generally speaking, the "masters of thought" of the seventies lost their influence over the minds of youth during the eighties while no new theories had time to replace the existing ones disproved by life. The contemporaries of this transitional period enjoyed their emancipation from any commonly accepted doctrine. The old literary masters one by one disappeared from the stage. Dostoevsky died in January 1881, Turgenev in August 1883, Saltykov was stricken in 1884 with a serious illness, and Gleb Uspensky ended his days a lunatic. Tolstoy drew the last logical conclusion from his denial of culture, science, and art, and this time his negation was

<sup>1</sup> V. Korolenko (1853-1921), novelist, editor, and journalist.—Ed.

in harmony with the minor key of the eighties. By formulating the doctrine of self-perfection and non-resistance to evil, Tolstoy facilitated the transition from the active self-sacrifice of the old Populists to the new ways of cultural recluses with their agricultural communes of intellectuals and other practices in which the faithful disciples strove to imitate their great master. The absolutism of the social ideal was transformed into that of an individual morality, including abstention from meat, wine, tobacco, and procreation. At the same time, the emancipation from the former rigorous principles of Populism produced a parallel teaching, that of intellectual and moral Epicureanism. It was among the representatives of this school that the longing for refined spiritual experiences eventually led to a revival of the interest in aesthetics, poetry, philosophy, and religion.

Notwithstanding the unmistakable decline of the civic spirit during the eighties, there is no justification for characterizing that period as a triumph of Philistinism. Such catchwords as "reconciliation with reality," or "the way of small deeds" provoked sneers and rebuffs from some of the intellectual leaders of public opinion. But if one remembers that under the cloak of these theories, which in the past served as a political disguise, there developed the activities of the *Zemstvos*,<sup>2</sup> that simultaneously the village schools were gaining ground and a considerable scientific progress was being achieved in the universities, one feels inclined to treat this period with more fairness and consideration.

Chekhov (1860-1904) was a typical representative of the positive traits of the eighties, and his great talent was developed in the cultural surroundings created by those years. During the seventies he would have suffocated. When his fellow writers spoke to him of solidarity, he said:

How do you know with whom I sympathize? You in St. Petersburg do like oppressiveness! Can it be that you do not all feel suffocated by such words as solidarity, union of young writers, community of interests, etc? . . . You may write where and what you like, a thousand times changing your convictions, yet my human relations with you will not be affected.

<sup>2</sup> Institutions of local self-government established in 1864 during the reforms of Alexander II.—Ed.

When Chekhov was accused of lacking principles, he again answered candidly:

I fear those who read between the lines trying to find a definite trend of thought, and who insist on considering me either a liberal or a conservative. I am neither liberal nor conservative, nor gradualist, nor ascetic, nor indifferentist. I should like to be an independent artist—and that is all. . . . Any trade mark or label to me means a prejudice. Sacrosanct to me are the human body, health, reason, talent, inspiration, love, and absolute freedom.

Chekhov was a physician and a naturalist by education, and in his autobiography he admitted that “the study of medicine had had a strong influence over his literary work,” while “knowledge of natural science and scientific methods kept him on his guard against the writers who denied science and those who attained everything by means of their own reasoning.” He censured Tolstoy for commenting on diseases and the foundling hospitals when “he never took the trouble to read any of the books written by specialists.” Chekhov affirmed that “in electricity and steam there was more real humanity than in chastity and abstention from meat.” A sound mind under the control of common sense made Chekhov immune to the utopianism and illusions of the seventies as well as those of the nineties. Regarding the philosophical and religious tendencies of Merezhkovsky, Minsky,<sup>3</sup> and others he said:

I lost my faith long ago and now I only watch with bewilderment the religious-minded intellectuals. . . . Religion stands apart from all modern culture. . . . Modern culture is the beginning of the work to be performed in the name of the great future, while the religious movement is a survival, almost the end, of that which is either dead or dying.

In Chekhov's *Boring Story* (1889), the old professor, also a learned physician and naturalist, was “poisoned by new ideas” at the end of his life. He regretted that he was “not a philosopher or

<sup>3</sup> D. Merezhkovsky (b. 1865), novelist, poet, literary critic, and writer on religious subjects. N. Minsky (1855–1937), one of the earlier Symbolist poets in Russia.—Ed.

theologian," and that "his soul cared nothing for such problems as the existence of the life beyond and the purpose of creation"; he confessed that "in none of his views . . . could even the most skilful analyst find what is called a general idea, or the God of a living man." But he admitted that while holding these ideas he considered them "worthy only of a slave and barbarian," and he ascribed their origin to his "generally run-down physical and moral condition." The critics were correct in supposing that all the ideas of the Professor were those of Chekhov himself. Being anxious, however, to attach to him one of the labels he so despised, they either accused him of "glorifying the Philistine," or, on the contrary, exonerated and praised him as the bitterest enemy and most powerful satirist of the very same Philistine. In fact, it would have been better to revise the conception of the Philistine rather than to apply it in its present meaning to Chekhov's works so free of tendentiousness. It was precisely this complete independence that made Chekhov a great realistic artist, and led him to international recognition.

The ideological interregnum of the eighties was the atmosphere in which the generation of the next decade grew up. This generation also enjoyed the privilege of absolute freedom in the choice of a trend of thought, but, hoping to attain final emancipation from depressing Russian actuality, it only enslaved itself to new foreign influences. Chukovsky, a literary critic and himself a typical Impressionist, has presented a clear picture of the freedom of choice which the epoch of confusion secured to this generation.

Gone is the old pathos, former fanaticism has disappeared [he complained]; shortsightedness reigns—there is none of that authority, will, force, or that mode of life which could unite and bind all together by an unbroken chain. Community of conceptions and criterions, definite hopes, demands, estimations, and superstitions are all created by a firmly established mode of life. At the present time literature has nothing to rely upon. When the mode of life was destroyed, we too collapsed.

Of course the old mode of life did not disappear at once, but it is true that by the end of the century a new stage in its destruction

became apparent. The same critic has observed correctly that at this period literature grew urban and consequently became imbued with the impressionism of ephemeral sensations. Undoubtedly the old mode of life had lost its power, thereby giving to the modern writers the courage to say: "I cast away the old bonds and sing new hymns" (Minsky) or "For the sake of new beauty we are breaking all the laws" (Merezhkovsky).

Merezhkovsky himself admitted, however, that victory was not so easily gained by the bards of the "new beauty." "Our speeches sound daring, but death dooms the untimely harbingers of a much-belated spring." Indeed, the first voices that heralded the neo-Romantic movement in Russian literature sounded uncertain and weak: they were soon suppressed by the inertia of old achievements and old ideology.

Merezhkovsky's own appearance came at a somewhat more opportune moment. His sensational pamphlet: *On the Cause of the Decline, and on the New Trends in Russian Literature* (1892) was a genuine manifesto of the new school. While lacking any real passion, it at least had fanaticism. Strange as it may appear, this passion and fanaticism had origin in a trend which contained neither of them—the European *fin de siècle*, commonly known as Decadence. It was Mikhailovsky who pointed out the direct source in Europe from which the Russians had imitated Decadence. This source was a group of young Frenchmen: Jean Moréas, Laurent Tailhade, Charles Morice, and other bohemians, who from the end of 1883 met at a cabaret in the Latin Quarter and who regarded Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé as their masters. Rozanov,<sup>4</sup> one of those who renounced the inheritance of the seventies, compared Merezhkovsky, very cleverly, with a foreigner who had lost his way in the streets of St. Petersburg. As though in confirmation of this simile Merezhkovsky began his pamphlet by saying: "On returning from Paris to Russia I felt with aggrieved bitterness . . . the old and familiar boredom, already described by Pushkin, . . . the stamp of an ugly semi-barbaric civilization." What was the trouble? It appeared that although Russia had "original and profound talents—there was no Russian literature," for

<sup>4</sup> V. Rozanov (1856–1919), writer on philosophical and religious subjects.—ED.

"the Russian writers had never attained perfect accord; up to the present each lives and dies in complete isolation. But in France one feels that there is life. There they had a period of Romanticism followed by reaction . . . which brought literature to the absurd extremes of coarse . . . Naturalism now growing numb. We are already witnessing at the present time the first vague efforts of the national genius to find new methods of expression. Indeed, Russia also passed through the same two stages: Romanticism and Naturalism.

Merezhkovsky intended to introduce a new, third stage, and illustrated his task by comparing Zola with Verlaine. Zola had protested against French youth:

By whom do they suppose they can replace us? Do they intend to confront the great positivist work of a decade with the vague notion of "Symbolism," under which worthless poetry takes cover? As a culmination to this great century and as a formula for the general agony of doubt, the anxiety of mind, and craving for the authentic, we are offered an enigmatical babble, absurd verses worth only a few cents and composed by a group of people who spend their lives in taverns.

Merezhkovsky took up the challenge. "Yes, Verlaine always sat in his favorite, rather poor café on the Boulevard St. Michel." But "What care I that he is almost a beggar having spent half his life in prison and in hospitals and that Zola is a ruler in literature, who, in a day or two, will be a member of the Academy?" In returning from Paris Merezhkovsky hoped to present Verlaine to Russia but found there a lack of interest in lofty ideas, a literature trading in vulgarity, and an absence of taste among critics, and he wondered: "Are we not standing over a chasm [a favorite word of Merezhkovsky]?"

No, Merezhkovsky reassured the readers, there exists in Russia . . . a new creative force, a new literary trend which reflects the vague longing of an entire generation, arising from the depths of the modern European and Russian spirit. . . . We are witnessing the great and significant struggle between two views of life, two diametrically opposite conceptions of the world. In its ultimate demands religious feeling clashes with the latest deductions of experi-



mental science, and modern art is characterized by three principal elements: mystical content, symbols, and the development of artistic susceptibility—which the French critics have rather cleverly called Impressionism. This avidity for that which has never before been experienced, the pursuit of elusive shades, of the obscure and unconscious in our sensibility, is a characteristic feature of the ideal poetry of the future.

While waiting, in the midst of the surrounding “desert,” for this poetry to appear, Merezhkovsky turned to the past for allies. Turgenev was considered a realist only by mistake, there was deep mysticism in Tolstoy, and Lermontov, Koltsov,<sup>5</sup> even Nekrasov also were mystics. In a word, “all literary temperaments, all trends, and all schools were consumed by the same impulse, by the wave of a powerful, deep current, an anticipation of the divine idealism, an indignation against the soulless positivist method, and an unquenchable longing for a new religious and philosophical reconciliation with the Incognizable.”

Before long Merezhkovsky's desire was almost fully realized. In the first place, there was a notable revival of poetry, and Russian literature returned to the form of verse which since the end of the thirties had been thrust into the background. The reputation of poets, temporarily forgotten or unnoticed, was reestablished; many beginners appeared, and above all this wealth there rose the word “Symbolism,” under the banner of which were enlisted the most powerful and gifted of the modernists. The gloomy Sologub (1863-1928), the sunny Balmont (b. 1867), and the sober Briusov (1873-1924) paid their tribute to the requirements of the times. Balmont, the poet of “fleeting moments,” adapted his inspiration to a new creed of “Revelation.” Sologub, a decadent by nature, as opposed to Merezhkovsky and Minsky, the decadents in ideas, according to his confession was “burdened by life among other people” and “in wild inspiration found ecstatic words.” Briusov, the son of a merchant, in his early days became familiar with night life, chose his friends from among the revelers, and at seventeen (1890) read the works of the French Decadents—Mallarmé, Rim-

<sup>5</sup> M. Lermontov (1814-41), famous poet, the chief representative of the romantic trend in Russian literature. A. Koltsov (1808-42), one of the earlier poets of peasant life in Russia.—ED.

baud, Verlaine, and others. He translated some fragments of their works which were published in 1894-95 in the two issues of the *Russian Symbolist*.

As the actual creator of the decadent style Briusov, no less than Merezhkovsky, had the right to the title of head of the school. The transition from Decadence to Symbolism can best be traced in his works. For the transformation into Symbolism, Decadence lacked a conception of the world by virtue of which the symbol became the means for intercourse with the beyond. In 1904 Briusov joined the ranks of Symbolists and took the oath of allegiance to the school's chief dogma.

Art is what in other spheres we call revelation. Works of art are a half-open door to eternity. . . . The ecstatic moments of supersensitive intuition lend a different understanding to worldly phenomena in penetrating more deeply their outer cover. . . . Those to whom everything in the world is simple, comprehensible, and attainable could never be artists. Art is present only where there exists daring and the impulse to penetrate beyond the perceivable.

Of course those who possessed such daring were of the highest "aristocratic" type, endowed with a special aristocratic morality. "There are not two paths, good and evil—there are two paths of good," said Minsky, and he illustrated this idea with an example of two men, one going to the east, the other to the west, who having walked round the world would meet at the same point. Merezhkovsky expressed the same idea in the following terms: "Evil and good—both paths lead but to one end, regardless of where one goes." These two paths are his favorite "chasms": "A chasm above and a chasm below—Christ and Antichrist." While Briusov echoed: "Love and sin are but one."

This theme reminds us of another source of the new literary school, besides French Decadence and Symbolism. The end of the nineteenth century was marked in Europe, and in Russia as well, by the strong influence of two "master thinkers," between whom, notwithstanding the difference in their personalities and spheres of action, we can draw an interesting parallel—Nietzsche and Marx. Both were sons of the reëstablished German Empire; both were preachers of the new catechism of action, relying on force, and

both professed a class principle on which they built the new ethics. Marx's bearer of the power and ethics of the new class was the "conscious vanguard" of workers, while that of Nietzsche was the old aristocratic type restored in the form of an improved superman. The aristocratic race was a "splendid fair-haired animal craving for prey and victory"—*die blonde Bestie*—that conquered the "weak, cowardly, dark-skinned, and dark-haired race," all of which reproduces exactly the German racialists' anthropological doctrine on the prehistoric part played by the noble Northern race. This race, like the superman, did not know the difference between good and evil. Good—"everything that increases the will for power and the power itself"—was the morality of the masters. To them all was conceded that served their own interests. Evil—"everything that originates from weakness"—was the morality of the slaves, who were guilty of clinging to the status of the oppressed. Good was the voluntaristic morality of the Old Testament with its stern avenging God. Evil was the philanthropic, weak morality of the New Testament, that of the evangelic Beatitudes addressed to the poor and the feeble—the morality of all who are humbled and oppressed. Power lay in the unconscious and free action of the instincts. The weakness and degeneration of the race began when reason prevailed over instinct and "illusions." Socrates, in this sense, was a fatal figure, for he caused the decline of Greek culture. It was not science or excessive knowledge that were needed but culture, i. e., the unity of artistic style, for the instinct of the people finds its expression in art and creative genius. The artist, "son and servant of the muses," was the real man of culture, while his antagonists were mere "Philistines of culture," whose sphere was the "rational" and the "real."

Nietzsche became known to the general public in Russia only in 1892-93, when a series of articles on his works was published in the *Problems of Psychology and Philosophy*. Thereafter his ideas presented in popular form spread rapidly, for they corresponded to the then prevailing mood. It was from this source that the Russian Symbolists borrowed their subtle conceptions of a "beyond" transcending good and evil.

Nietzscheism strengthened the Decadents' characteristic contempt of Philistinism. They could now call "Philistines of culture"

all those who did not belong to the intimate circle of servants of the muses, endowed with the gift of envisioning the "Incognizable."

The new morality of the strong supermen and demi-gods, to whom "all was conceded," and who from their exalted position heaped insults upon the Philistines, rapidly won the attention of those beyond the confines of the intimate circle. Lack of restraint in form and thought sanctioned unrestrained behavior. But there was also a tragic side to Nietzsche's hurried "revaluation of values" (*Umwertung der Werthe*), and in Russia this was reflected in the works of Leonid Andreiev (1871-1919). Tolstoy once said of Andreiev: "He wants to inspire fear, but I am not afraid." Andreiev's despair, however, was not a pose, at least not in the beginning, for the pessimism of his earlier and best works resulted naturally from his nervous condition, which led him to repeated attempts at suicide. The chief theme of these works was the loneliness of man. In *Grand Slam* and *Silence* he showed the tragedy of spiritual solitude, the isolation of the individual among the everyday surroundings of normal human relations. But when the ideology of the new morality made its appearance the attitude of loneliness changed into one of superiority. Andreiev's hero assumed the part of superman and spoke in the forced, rhetorical language of abstract symbols. Sasha, Andreiev's thirteen-year-old schoolboy hero, "endowed with a restless and bold spirit," while lacking understanding, "cannot accept evil calmly and so takes his revenge on life."

According to Schopenhauer life was an insidious delusion of nature and had to be revenged—as Kirilov, one of Dostoevsky's heroes did—by manifesting the supreme will power of man in suicide. Andreiev was not a philosopher, but the influence exerted upon him by the negative, pessimistic theories of Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's applied philosophy was confirmed by his own statements as well as by the critical studies of his works. The influences of Pszibyszewski, Hamsun, and Maeterlinck upon Andreiev should also be mentioned.

Later on, with maturity, Andreiev's hero began to ask "fateful questions" and attempted to solve the problems of the universe. "Speak!" he addressed Heaven. But Heaven proved an empty

space, and the gaping, silent void reflected an increasing sense of terrific loneliness in the individual's consciousness. As ever before, there was no escape except in a loud but futile protest—or in death, which now found its justification in the maxims of Zarathustra. In death was the triumph of freedom, the victory of all that was "immaculate and beautiful in the world—the bold, free, immortal Ego of man." Andreiev in his *Thought* obliterated the line which divided reality from insanity, in *Judas Iscariot* that between truth and falsehood, love and treason, and in the *Life of Vasily Fiveisky* that between faith and atheism. He protested passionately against the "cold silence" of nature. Nature trifled wickedly with the highest emotions of Man (Man with capital M), without discriminating between young and old, the happy and the unhappy, mocking at the will of man, transforming life into an absurdity, and depriving man of individuality. With the growth of this pessimistic tendency, Symbolism and conventionality of style progressed, while Andreiev's former realism vanished. This culminated in *Anathema* in which he summarized his dismal negation of human reason, love, and faith.

The genius of Andreiev, with his deranged psychology bordering on insanity and suicide, characterized the end of the transitional period, at the beginning of which had stood Chekhov, the realist and poet of common sense. Notwithstanding the vast difference in their views, moods, and artistic images, they possessed one trait in common which showed that they belonged to the same historical period. The one avoided formulation of any "conception of the world," while the other, having tried to formulate the problem, found no solution for it. Thus both met on a common ground which can be best described by the title of Sienkiewicz's novel: *Without Dogma*. But at the time Andreiev was writing, a new dogma had already been in existence in the form of Symbolism, the accepted creed of the aesthetes, the followers of the European Decadents, and their antagonist, Nietzsche. During the nineties there also appeared another school opposed to the aesthetes which, though not yet very clearly defined, soon opened war on them, and in the following decade succeeded in gaining considerable public attention and support. At first there were many threads connecting the two trends, some of which re-

mained until later days. In fact, they were united in a denial of the past and a refutation of Philistinism. Moreover, they both had developed in the same social surroundings—those of the city—though each was supported by different urban strata. The Symbolist movement was connected with the old intelligentsia of the liberal professions, that cultured urban stratum consisting of impoverished noblemen and the upper and middle classes; it was patronized by the younger members of the wealthy merchants' families, imbued with modern European refinement and decadent tendencies. This set, to which belonged Merezhkovsky, Briusov, Balmont, and their younger followers, repudiated Philistinism—the former “dark kingdom” of Ostrovsky—from above, while the other group repudiated Philistinism from below, and found its themes and part of its readers among the proletarians, at the bottom of the urban society, where needy students met tramps, villagers who had come to town in search of work, the unemployed, and the outcasts of every social group. Due to the conditions in which they lived, these homeless, unemployed people had acquired complete freedom and independence from the established social canons, and when taught to fight for a yet unknown but better future, and to overthrow the wealthy classes and the existing social order, they yielded easily to that propaganda. The appearance in literature of a gifted writer who sprang from these very people created a great impression, and he, little by little, became their champion and interpreter of their hopes.

We allude, of course, to Maxim Gorky (1868–1936). Under this pen name A. M. Peshkov entered the literary field and immediately achieved fame as the bard of the proletariat. Chekhov at once saw in Gorky's tendencies a return to the materialistic movement so fashionable in the sixties, and while at the time this diagnosis was rather premature, Gorky's subsequent development actually followed a course along these lines and was contrary to that of the aesthetes, mystics, and Symbolists. Gorky himself did not realize at first that in repudiating the old dying Populism he was following Marxism, the new, increasingly fashionable doctrine. It was his cheerful optimism and firm belief in his heroes, who by their muscular strength towered above the peasants, that linked Gorky to the Marxists. “It is not true that life is gloomy,

that it consists of nothing but plague, groans, sorrow, and tears," said Shebuev, his hero (in *Muzhik*). . . . "Life is beautiful; life is a sublime, indomitable progress towards universal happiness and joy. . . . I cannot doubt it. . . . I have followed a difficult course; . . . none of you, not even all of you together, have ever known as much grief, suffering, and humiliation as I have! . . . But—life is beautiful!"

Gorky's biography is fantastic. Cruel treatment by his grandfather in the oppressive surroundings of a petty bourgeois family, then the drab existence of a boy forcibly apprenticed to a cobbler, a draftsman, and a cook on a steamer; at night, taking refuge in an attic, he read furtively everything that came to his hands; later, a life in Kazan among longshoremen, tramps, and criminals; his first associations with university students whom he met in a grocery store, and his realization of the error in the abstract conception of the people by the intellectuals, the first connection with the revolutionists and propaganda among his fellow bakers; then work at a fishery on the Caspian Sea; as a night watchman at a railway station in the province of Tambov; and finally a long tramp to Nizhny Novgorod where his acquaintance with V. G. Korolenko led Gorky into the literary field, but did not end his wanderings. In search of new adventures he went in 1891 to the Don, to Novorossia, and to Tiflis, where, in 1892, his first story was published. Following all these picturesque experiences and the strenuous struggle for existence, peaceful city life seemed to him pale and empty. "It is necessary to have been born in cultured society," he said in *Konovalov*, "in order to spend one's whole life in its midst without once wishing to leave its world of burdensome conventions, traditional habits, petty venomous falsehoods, unhealthy ambitions, intellectual sectarianism, and hypocrisy—in a word, all this vanity of vanities, which chills the emotions and perverts the mind." Like Tolstoy in his earlier days—and for analogous reasons—Gorky was ready always to retire from the vanities of the world. But Tolstoy went into the country and from the manor sought his way to the peasant hut, while Gorky found his sphere among the frank, free, cheerful, and unconventional knight-hood of vagabonds, whom he thought superior to the peasantry.

Gorky, the literary godson of Korolenko, that true champion of humanitarianism in Russia, soon became an "ugly duckling" with strong spreading wings. He was replete with hatred for the "cultured" circles above him and joined in the fashionable repudiation of them for being bourgeois and Philistine. "The strong are a law unto themselves," said his fellow traveler "Prince" Shakro Ptadze. "By what laws should I feel constrained?" declared the hero of *The Scoundrel* (1898). "There are no laws, except perhaps my own." In *The Error* Gorky wrote and subsequently erased: "Is it moral or immoral? In any case it is preëminently strong, and therefore moral and good."

The term "Philistine," used by the aesthetes in a derisive sense, was daringly applied by Gorky to the intelligentsia itself—the "barbarians of higher culture"—a phrase which reminds one of Nietzsche's "Philistines of culture." Nor did Russian peasantry escape Gorky's censure. In his reminiscences he said that when the Populists in the students' circles spoke of the people, "With astonishment and reluctant to believe it myself, I felt that I could not approach the subject in the same light as these men. To them the people embodied wisdom, spiritual beauty, and kind-heartedness, and were a depository for the principles of the Good, the Beautiful, and the Sublime. I never knew such a people." In one of Gorky's stories Chelkash, an "old hunted wolf," smuggler, and thief, is far superior to a peasant. He looks down with disdain upon Gabriel, a peasant fellow-thief, who with the stolen money had hoped to better his household. Chelkash "never could be so covetous and mean"; he would rather spend the loot in drinking and debauch. We see here already that aimless "recklessness of the brave," which Gorky opposed to the psychology of the wretched "creeping reptiles" whose motto was: "A creature of the soil—by soil I thrive." The Siskin, in Gorky's allegorical tale, urged the birds, "feeding on worms," to "fly onward to where it was so wonderful" and reproved the weak and sickly falcons for being "deaf to the voice of honor and reason" and "crawling into ravines instead of soaring to the sky." Gorky's suspicion and fear of the unenlightened masses of peasants remained an obsession with him throughout his life. However, during the pre-revolutionary period



he could not have been called the poet of the working class. Even at the time when the fortieth anniversary of his literary activities was celebrated, the Soviet critics debated at great length in the Communist Academy on the propriety of bestowing upon him the title of "proletarian writer." But Gorky's sudden popularity proved that the public had accepted him as an interpreter of the new tendency which had emanated from Marx. The circles of urban aesthetes, which at the beginning he seemed to have joined in repeating the ideas of Nietzsche and Stirner, could never have provided him with such a large public as that which in a few months of 1903 had bought up five editions of his complete works in six volumes, and in the same year absorbed another fourteen editions of his play *At the Bottom*. This showed the proportional strength of the two literary currents, the subsequent fate of which was to be so dissimilar.

In the pre-revolutionary years of the twentieth century this difference became more and more apparent. Under the pressure of the growing revolutionary tendencies demanding a return to life, to reality, the mist of the nineties was soon dispelled. In these circumstances the renunciation of life, spiritual aristocracy and exclusiveness, and the disdain shown the bourgeois surroundings, had rendered little service to the aesthetes of the nineties. Instead of an enthusiastic audience the artistic literary circles found themselves in an ever widening empty space. Now, when Balmont was writing like everybody else and everybody wrote like Balmont, in order to attract the attention of the public it was necessary either to carry the literary revolution to an extreme, thus continuing and completing the destruction of the old literary forms, or else to associate literature with the revolution in the political and social sense. But the literary extravagances produced merely a temporary impression on the bourgeois, for they were too artificial, and comprehensible only to a few, while the revolutionary songs of the aesthetes, who had but taken on new moods as the next theme for their "momentary" inspiration, sounded mostly out of tune. This outward union between literature and revolution could not long continue; the first revolution of 1905 put an end to it.

Yet Decadence and Symbolism did not surrender at once to the new trends. The progress of their decay, in the first place, led to

the appearance of new moods within Symbolism and to new varieties in its development. The younger generation naturally was more conscious of the new tendencies, and it strove to introduce fresh material into the doctrine and practices of Symbolism. We shall now familiarize ourselves with the results of this process.

Two belated Symbolists of the younger generation, both endowed with great talent, were victims, rather than creators, of the new mood prevailing in the literary movement of the early twentieth century: A. A. Blok (1880-1921), who imbued his poetry with the torments of his soul, and Andrey Bely (Boris Bugaev, 1880-1934), whose prose abounded in mannerisms. Like their predecessors they were both the products of city life. They both memorized easily the three commandments of their teacher Briusov:

Accept the first: do not live in the present:  
Only the future is the world of a poet.  
Remember the second: sympathize with no man,  
But love yourself boundlessly.  
Keep the third: worship art,  
Art alone—wholly and aimlessly.

The adherence to these commandments was perhaps more characteristic of Blok than of any other poet in his circle. Quite simply and even unconsciously, by his very nature, he complied with them. "Do not live in the present": the only feeling which unusual contemporary events aroused in Blok was that of repulsion mingled with contempt and disdain. His mood (1901) was "abstract and contrary to all mob passions." In 1905 he wrote to his father:

My attitude towards the liberation movement has been expressed almost exclusively in liberal conversations and only for a time was I in sympathy with the Social Democrats. Now I am retiring more and more. . . . My spirit does not adapt itself to any of this. I shall never be a revolutionary or a "builder of life" . . . either by nature, quality, or the theme of my spiritual feelings.

Before taking a trip to Italy he wrote to his mother (1909): "Either one should never live in Russia, or else isolate one's self from the humiliation of partisan politics and social activities." The trip to Western Europe only led him to apply these views to all contemporary civilizations.

More than ever I realize that to my dying day I shall never be able to adapt myself to modern life or be conquered by it. Its shameful state inspires me with disgust. Nothing could change it now—not even a revolution. With the exception of a few, humanity will rot. All that I love is art, children, and death.

The first part of the second commandment, "Sympathize with no man," was also strictly kept by Blok. Brought up at home among women and from childhood spoiled by the attention of those about him, Blok became unsociable. He was reluctant to abandon his intimate circle and was always glad to return to it.

"Worship art . . . aimlessly." That, of course, was the easiest for Blok to achieve since it was his natural sphere. According to his own statement (1904) he began by writing verse on "the eternal and the absolute which sooner or later all must accept." During that same year, however, he came under the strong influence of Briusov and Balmont. Up to that time he had not read a single line of modern poetry. The new influence led him to abuse things previously held sacred, to deride his earlier apocalyptic expectations, and to become a man about town and a frequenter of night cabarets. As early as 1905 Blok declared that Decadence with its magic and "Black Mass" was at an end. By 1908 he came to the conclusion that as a child of culture and not of nature, he stood aloof from the people and his intellectual poetry was incomprehensible to them. Therefore he felt the need of withdrawing from the vicious circle of the Russian writers, who became odious to him, and finally, in 1911-12, he openly revolted against "the so-called Symbolism." "We passed through an epoch which lacked character. . . . Now the epoch is over and, consequently, we again need the human soul in its entirety, all that is of the world, and a complete man . . ." (a letter to Andrey Bely, October 1911). In his diary, under the date of January 2, 1912, we find the following ironical confession:

When people live too long in seclusion, as for instance the Decadents of the nineties who concerned themselves only with subjects incomprehensible to the masses, and then, later on, resume their life in the world, they are lost, become helpless, and (many of them) frequently sink below the level of the masses. It has happened thus

to most of us. . . . I write as one newly born. The more accustomed one is to niceties, the more disconnected become one's meditations on life. . . . Until a real connecting link is found between the transient and the everlasting, not only can one not become an intelligible writer, but one can be of no use whatsoever.

Thus with a feeling of tragedy Blok forsook mysticism, so dear to his "spiritual ego," and the commandments of the Symbolists and the aesthetes which dominated his soul, for the living reality. Andrey Bely had a very different nature. Blok was home-loving while Bely was a wanderer. The former was the product of his family, to which in spite of many hardships he was attached up to the day of his death. The latter began by denying his family and subsequently derided them, thus nursing his malicious irony. Bely was more erudite and "scientific" than Blok, but he did not possess Blok's ever present earnestness or his inner tragedy. Blok was lazy and loved secluded contemplation; he suffered from self-analysis, from the tortures of a disturbed conscience, and unreciprocated sentiments. Bely was also unhappy at times, but he treated lightly the problems and emotions which caused Blok's heart to bleed. He was subjected to various influences, from that of Vladimir Soloviev to that of Rudolph Steiner;<sup>6</sup> he was versatile, like his style, restless and sociable, less deep but more balanced than Blok, who was all instinct and passion; Bely was more artificial than natural. Notwithstanding all his apparent etherealism he was more able to adapt himself to life than Blok. Bely's chief achievement in literature did not consist in the development of complex problems but in his skilful introduction of exaggerated modernism in its outer form. A decadent by nature, an admirer of modernism in art, particularly in music, Bely applied it to writing, and in his works reality was interwoven with the unreal, the conscious with the subconscious. While Blok, in anguish, severed the shackles of the doctrine, Bely with his apparent independence and inclination to compromise, remained within its boundaries.

Blok was not the only one seeking a path which would lead away from the abstract in Symbolism to the actuality of life. During the winter season of 1912-13 a manifesto was issued by two

<sup>6</sup> On Soloviev, the Russian religious thinker, see Part I, ch. 7. Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925), German philosopher, the founder of Anthroposophy.—Ed.

new apostates: Serge Gorodetsky (b. 1884), a pupil of Balmont, and Gumilev (1885-1921), a pupil of Briusov. The new group, which was destined to be a short-lived one, called itself Acmeism (Greek *akme* = summit) or Adamism (after the new Adam who had to give new names to all things). The Acmeists revolted against all "mists, shadowy forms, and vague outlines" and undertook the performance of a "new heroic deed: to sing the praise of the living world." For them "the rose by its petals, fragrance, and coloring was again beautiful in itself and not because of its spiritual similarity to mystical love or to anything else" (Gorodetsky). To Anna Akhmatova (b. 1895), who joined the Acmeists, religion was a steadfast and simple belief in its historically established forms, rituals, etc., and not a mystical intuition. The Acmeists did not approve of the passion for musical sound in words. From the music of poetry they passed to its "plastic" side, and they tried to make words more material and more substantial by endowing them with a concrete meaning.

Almost simultaneously with Acmeism (1912) a "more earthly and spirited" (according to Blok) opposition to Symbolism appeared in the form of Futurism. Officially Futurism was founded in 1909 upon the publication in Italy of the first manifestoes of Marinetti. But it was not until 1911 that the Russian Futurists were noticed by the public, when at St. Petersburg Igor Severianin (b. 1887), announcing himself an "Ego-Futurist," sang his brilliant verses at the "poeso-concerts," and when as a protest against him Cubo-Futurism was created in Moscow. The "parlor mannerism" of Igor Severianin was opposed by the Cubo-Futurists with a return to "primitive coarseness," and Maiakovsky (1894-1930) became the most outstanding representative of that group.

What did the Futurists contribute? The French Decadents had already taken from verse both the rhyme and a coherent logical meaning. Marinetti explicitly sanctioned this formless style, insisting that the modern era of big towns, telephones, cinemas, aeroplanes, subways, and skyscrapers needed a special "wireless imagination" or an "absolute freedom of form without any wires, such as syntax and punctuation," in other words, a telegraphic style, by which the effect of the word is accentuated and strengthened. An "egocentric" isolated word was considered of sufficient value in

itself, and many experiments were made with it. In the writings of Maiakovsky and his associates destructive prevailed over any constructive tendencies, and a prominent place was assigned to the derision of tradition. The manifesto published in 1912 by the Futurists, and intended to be a "slap in the face of the public taste," read: "Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc., overboard from the steamer of modernity," while Maiakovsky announced: "I shall reveal to you—with words—as plain as mooing—our new souls" (dashes are used for strophes). In 1915, this poet having been repudiated by his contemporaries prophesied: "I—who have been derided by the people of today—as a tedious—obscene jest—see crossing the ranges of time—what no one has yet seen— . . . in a revolutionary crown of thorns—is advancing the year sixteen."

However, the Futurists were not suited to be the poets of the revolution. Notwithstanding all Maiakovsky's efforts, this poetry remained incomprehensible to the people. Pasternak (b. 1890) was the last in the line of the pre-revolutionary Futurist poets, and with him this "poetry for the poets" attained the peak of its expression.

In passing to another type of literature more closely connected with the real life of the times, it is necessary to leave the restricted ground of Symbolism and all the other "isms" which appeared under its patronage or in opposition to it. Gorky was the central figure in this sphere. At the dawn of the new century he had sung the "spring song" of the "Stormy Petrel." ("Storm! Soon will burst the storm! the daring stormy petrel is soaring proudly among lightnings high above the roaring, angry sea; the call is of the prophet of victory. Let the storm increase.")

According to Gorky's own acknowledgment, from 1901 to 1917 he was in charge of hundreds of thousands of roubles donated for the support of the Social Democratic party; persecuted by the police, after January 9, 1905, he was imprisoned in the fortress of SS. Peter and Paul, and upon his release chose to continue his work abroad. But before his exile Gorky had founded (in 1904) the periodical *Znanie* (Knowledge) which appeared until 1913, and the best contemporary writers—realist and radical—contributed to it. The title suggested the enthusiasm with which Gorky, with his recent experience of self-education, regarded science. Among the blind and cruel forces of nature "the only true, sacred, and great

one is the uninterruptedly progressing man, and in him his continuously growing reason, which being founded on knowledge can tame nature and make its forces serve the purpose of man." In a revolution the principle of reason must organize the popular element. But in Gorky's understanding the principle of reason was represented in Russia by a weak and timid intelligentsia, while the popular element was uncivilized and even barbarian, and at times he vacillated between the two, finally nevertheless showing preference for the popular element. To bridge the gap between these two forces and to prevent a conflict between them was the principal aim of that school on the island of Capri to which Gorky gave his personal and financial support. In this work his closest collaborator was the Social Democrat Bolshevik, Bogdanov, who unfolded a complete theory of forming a new science and art, which would have the proletariat as its bearer. This class should be given an "integral education forcefully shaping their will and mentality." In opposition to the bourgeois individualism, the new proletarian culture had to be built up on the principle of coöperation, having as its ultimate aim a complete reconstruction of the life of all humanity. This aim could be reached with the help of a new "universal science of organization." As a tool for the organization of the masses, art was deemed to be even more powerful than science, because the language of images had a stronger appeal and could be more easily understood.

Another important manifestation, quite new to the history of Russian literature and closely associated with Gorky's activities, was the appearance of a host of writers springing from the peasant and working classes. Of course there were precedents for this when Pushkin and Belinsky condescendingly acclaimed the poetry of Slepushkin, a peasant, and Belinsky admired the genius of Koltsov. Spiridon Drozhzhin, the patriarch of a later generation of peasant poets, was born in 1848 and remained to the end true to his class. The jubilee of his literary activities was celebrated in 1923. I. Z. Surikov (1841-80), another pioneer of peasant poetry, was less successful in his work, though a group of writers springing from the people assembled around him and after his death organized a society bearing his name. But absorption by the lower urban bourgeoisie, through which they lost connection with their own ele-

ment, was the common fate of the majority of the earlier writers who sprang from the people. At the same time it was rather difficult for them to enter the literary set, though in their biographies L. Tolstoy, Korolenko, Gorky, and others constantly figure as sympathetic sponsors. Gorky in particular was besieged by the new converts to literature—the self-taught men. As literacy and reading matter increased towards the beginning of the twentieth century the number of these writers grew enormously. In 1911 Gorky presented very interesting data on this literature which emerged into the world from many distant parts of Russia. "During the years 1906-10," he wrote, "I read over four hundred manuscripts, the authors of which were of the people. Many of these works were illiterate, and will never be published, but they bore the stamp of a human soul and in them echoed the spontaneous voice of the masses." Out of 348 authors 179 dwelt in the city, while 169 lived in factory settlements, railway stations, and villages. It was possible to establish the professions of only 237 authors: almost half of them (114) belonged to the working class, sixty-seven to the peasantry, and fifty-six were city artisans, small traders, or employees. Only eleven of them had ever before had their works published. On another occasion Gorky wrote:

The number of clumsy verses and unskilful prose is ever increasing, while higher and sprightlier sound the voices of these writers; one feels in the lower strata of life that within the man there grows the longing for a bigger, broader life, and a thirst for freedom; that he passionately wants to communicate his young thoughts, encourage weary fellow man, and show his affection to the mournful country.

Finally, in an introduction to the first issue of the magazine *Proletarian Writer*, in 1914, Gorky addressed the workmen as follows: "This book is a new and very important phenomenon in our hard life. . . . Possibly in the future this little book will be referred to as one of the Russian proletariat's first steps towards creating its own artistic literature." However, he was compelled to admit that progress was small because of an insufficient aptitude with the pen, unfamiliarity with the technique of work, and, especially, because of the inability "to choose from a dozen words the one that is simple, strong, and beautiful."



Nevertheless, among the host of unsuccessful people, or those successful yet lacking originality, there gradually emerged some striking figures endowed with distinct personality. From writing verse they passed on to the more difficult but more gratifying prose. Little by little two distinct groups, which at first had been merged, began to be discernible—the urban writers (mostly factory hands) and those from the villages. Conforming to this distinction the content of both the verse and the prose became more varied, while in addition to this the country writers introduced an unlimited variety of colors, forms, impressions, and dialects from different districts of Russia.

It is impossible in this study to enumerate all the writers springing from the people, whose number steadily continued to increase. Their austere lives and struggle for achievement remind us of the sorrowful biographies of the "commoner" writers of the sixties, although they possessed some characteristic peculiarities. Those who did not forsake all connection with the countryside could at least find a limited support in their villages, though peasant life appeared to them dark and cruel after they had had a taste of civilization. Nevertheless the poetry of agricultural work in the bosom of nature, the free vastness of the steppes, the wide expanse of the "Mother Volga" and "Kama the Beautiful," supplied ample material for their inspiration. Those who worked in factories, or spent their lives among the dregs of the city living on niggardly earnings from day labor, were much worse off. It was here in particular that ire and hatred were concentrated towards the wealth and luxury of the upper classes, both so near and yet so unattainable, towards the exploiters of labor and the entire order of things responsible for these social inequalities. Here were bred the revolutionary fighters, who remanned the ranks of underground revolutionary organizations, with the inevitable results—imprisonment and banishment. Many of these writers of the people were deprived of those educational opportunities which the "commoner" writers of the sixties could have profited by, but often chose to ignore. With quite extraordinary persistence and determination, under the most unfavorable conditions, such as in attics lit by a tallow candle, or in dark corners and cellars, or during the few moments of leisure at a desk, they strove to supply the lack of

formal education by reading everything that fell into their hands until they became blind and dizzy.

It remains only to mention the exceptional cases when by their efforts these writers achieved a more or less equal recognition with other members of the upper literary circles. Klychkov (b. 1887), Kliuev (b. 1887), and the youngest and best known of the three, Serge Esenin (1895-1925), were those among the members of the "neo-peasant" group of poets who during the pre-revolutionary period attained success. All three were subject to the influence of Koltsov, as well as to that of the modern Symbolists, Balmont, Blok, and Bely. Klychkov, because of his melodious songs of a purely lyrical nature, was unanimously proclaimed the "peasant Fet,"<sup>7</sup> while Kliuev, though imbued with revolutionary feelings, understood how to harmonize them with the rhythm of folk songs.

Serge Esenin does not appear to have been such a rare phenomenon among his contemporaries as is customarily thought. With his youthful spontaneity and breeziness, the "curly-headed, jolly lad" was only closer to the soil which had bred him and more lavish in scattering the wealth of the animistic folklore and the primitive peasant piety. Esenin's images were famous for their daring and exaggeration, and therefore became exceptionally popular during the reign of Symbolism. With the same spontaneity with which he exposed the treasures of his rustic imagination, Esenin submitted himself to the influences of the Symbolist poetry and of the socialist doctrine, but both were blended with folk songs and peasant ideology. We shall see in the next chapter where all this confusion led him, together with the further development in the history of the workman-peasant literature.

<sup>7</sup> The reference here is to the famous lyrical poet of the second half of the nineteenth century. See above, Ch. II.—ED.

## IV

# LITERATURE UNDER THE SOVIET RÉGIME

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THE attitude of the October Revolution<sup>1</sup> towards literature and art was necessarily very different and far more complicated than that towards the church and religion. It is true that attempts were made to deny art and to approach literature from a strictly utilitarian, technological point of view. In the opinion of one revolutionary writer, "Art like religion was an opiate for the people," while a proletarian poet predicted that art (like the state and social classes) would disappear under the future socialist régime. But this attitude had not been shared either by the government or the majority of the writers. Therefore, if in the early days after the Bolshevik victory literature seemed to have disappeared, while church and religion, on the contrary, felt no effects of the revolution, the fact can be attributed to the difference in the social strata on which they were respectively based. To use the official Marxian terms, pre-revolutionary Russian literature lost both the "consumption" and the "production" basis of its existence. In other words, the cultured class, which furnished the "consumers," i. e., the readers, had been ruined and almost entirely annihilated. The bourgeois readers vanished—or had no time for literature—while new ones had not yet appeared. Moreover, the civil war that followed had created an atmosphere in which it was impossible for the "producers," i. e., the writers, to publish their works. There were no publishers, and the literary circles were compelled to

<sup>1</sup> I. e., the revolution that overthrew the Provisional Government and established the Soviet régime.—ED.

produce literature for private use and the entertainment of the authors, as was done in the days of Elizabeth and Catherine II and in the salons of the eighteen-forties. Literary works were read aloud to an intimate circle of friends or sold in bookshops as "autographs." The cabaret was another, less intimate medium for the display of creative activity. But this oral or stage literature required a special "shock" style, beyond the reach of the old writers.

Such were the conditions during the early years of the Soviet dictatorship, and in themselves they explain why the authors of the preceding epoch, regardless even of their attitude towards political events, have abandoned their work. In many other respects life became extremely difficult for the men of letters. Every effort had to be concentrated on obtaining rations, which were reduced for the intellectuals, by standing in line, or on procuring additional clothes and nourishment at the secret market. Besides starvation, undernourishment, and unaccustomed physical efforts there was no light or heat in the winter, and even more than hunger the cold and "life in fur coats" paralyzed the creative power. With the exception of a few fortunate ones who were in close coöperation with the authorities, these conditions of life were more or less the same for everybody. However, life was even more unbearable for those who were unable, or unwilling on principle, to conceal their disapproval of the new masters. This position was held by the representatives of the old literature, the belated followers of the classical period and Populist ideology. The Romanticists of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries were connected by many personal and spiritual links to their contemporaries of the victorious camp. Only a short time before, their works had been published in the same magazines or in the issues of *Znanie* and *Shipovnik* (Eglantine), so there was no immediate differentiation in this group between those accepting and not accepting the new régime. The majority hesitated before making the choice, but at the same time when the rule of martial law—"Whoever is not with us, is against us"—was introduced on both sides of the barricade, few succeeded in remaining neutral.

The first to retire, and the majority to emigrate abroad, were the mature writers connected with the old social classes and unwilling to accept the new order. I. A. Bunin (b. 1870), the last bard of the

manor and later the Nobel laureate; A. I. Kuprin (1870–1938), the true artist of past days, who when fatally ill returned to Russia to die; Leonid Andreiev, the rebel against life's new grimaces, who soon died in Finland; and I. S. Shmelev (b. 1875), the victim of the revolution against which he revenged himself with all the force of his passion and hatred, were the most outstanding of the group. D. S. Merezhkovsky, Z. N. Hippius (b. 1869), N. M. Minsky, Igor Severianin, A. M. Remizov (b. 1877), and Marina Tsvetaeva (b. 1892), mostly leaders of the neo-romantic period and senior Symbolists, disturbed in their meditations and verse writing by crude reality, also retired or emigrated. Balmont, the poet of "fleeting moments"—who in 1905 had proclaimed himself a revolutionary, in 1918 asked the question: "Am I a revolutionary?" and in 1922 published the "Song of a Working Mallet"—finally realized that there was discord between his lyrics and the songs of the moment, and reverted to his original stand: "The agony of my people is strange to me; strange to me is the entire world in its struggle." Sick and discouraged, he also emigrated. A. N. Tolstoy (b. 1882), and Andrey Bely were the two younger writers who, prompted by practical rather than ideological considerations, went temporarily abroad (the former from 1919 to 1923, the latter from the autumn of 1921 to that of 1923); both subsequently returned to Russia, relying on the New Economic Policy (NEP). Tolstoy was the only one to succeed in winning popularity and large royalties in the USSR.

The writers of this last generation and this type marked the dividing line between those who remained and those who went abroad.<sup>2</sup> A. S. Serafimovich (b. 1863), was the only one of the old generation to have decisively, from its first days, joined the October movement; because of this, his fellow writers formally excluded him from their friendly Wednesday Circle in Moscow. V. V. Veresaev's (Smidovich, b. 1867), recantation was not a change, for in fact he had long since joined the Marxists and "was on intimate terms with the workmen and revolutionary youth." Although Valery Briusov had already begun in 1910 his return

<sup>2</sup> I. V. Vladislavlev counted thirty-eight émigré writers and classified them as follows: twenty-two of the landed nobility, six of the merchant class, seven of the middle class, and three whose descent could not be ascertained.

"from the desert to the people" (*Tertia Vigilia*), and become an urbanist, he found the transition more difficult. "I prefer large houses built of steel and glass," he wrote at the time when he abandoned Verlaine for Verhaeren. So after October the naturally flexible and calculating Briusov had only to make a final effort. In 1919 he joined the Bolshevik Party and held several posts—director of the Art Department in the Glavprofobr (Central Board of Professional Education), member of the State Scientific Council, dean of the Institute of Literary Art, etc. He attended to his new duties with a "definite good will," but nevertheless was unable to adapt himself to his new colleagues. Although in his last poems (1922-24) Briusov eulogized Lenin, in his heart he could not conceal from himself the tragedy of his "transfiguration." Death put an end to this spiritual tragedy.

In view of Blok's previous evolution it was natural for him to accept the revolution, and then to join the Bolsheviks. His "transition from the abstract to life" had taken place at an earlier time. In 1908 he wrote: "The venom of Decadence lies in its lack of richness, brilliancy, vitality, and picturesqueness. . . . But life abounds in vital substance which the artist should embody." Of course there was much that was bad, "fetid" in reality. Yet Blok, having discarded the symbols, sought the real "face of humanity" although it be a sad one. This mood developed and was strengthened after he had worked during the war at the front and during the February Revolution<sup>3</sup> on the committee to investigate the illegal activities of the former ministers. In June 1917 he wrote in his diary: "No one seems to realize the fact that never before has there been in Russia such an exemplary order, and that this order is maintained with dignity and calm by the revolutionary masses. What right have we, the brains of the country, to insult by our worthless bourgeois incredulity the clever, quiet, and wise revolutionary masses?" and he added: "I should not wonder if we are killed in the name of order."

All this explains also Blok's outburst of national feelings in opposition to Russia's former allies, the "Aryans," against whom "we will open wide the gates to the Orient" and "simulate Asi-

<sup>3</sup> I.e., the revolution that overthrew the monarchy and established the Provisional Government.—Ed.

atics." In 1918 he wrote the poem "Scythians" in which, under the influence of his nationalistic wrath, he surrendered too hastily the right of the Russians to be ranked among the European people, even from the anthropological point of view. ("Yes, we are Scythians, yes, we are Asiatics, with our slanting and avid eyes.") The same mood explains the appearance of his famous poem "The Twelve," which so astonished his old friends. Its wonderful artistic complexity and its inexorable realism were unfairly interpreted by both parties concerned in the struggle as a political ambiguity and blasphemy. "The Twelve," Blok's swan song, was followed not by repentance or loss of hope in the future, but by disappointment and death in 1921.

Even before the revolution Gorky had assumed a special attitude towards the Bolsheviks. He rendered them many services of a material character, particularly by establishing his school at Capri. The author of the *Stormy Petrel*, even though his views on the October Revolution were at first negative and then rather equivocal, was favored by Lenin and therefore had to be treated with consideration. It was during the revolutionary years that Gorky wrote his most artistic works, in which however, not without intention, he entered into reminiscences of his past. Even Voronsky, the most sympathetic of the Soviet critics, admitted that in Gorky's recent works there was much that was untimely, and though he "wrote even better than before, yet . . . for the contemporary reader, particularly the young one, these works sounded duller . . . they were not blatant." When back in 1907 Gorky wrote *Mother*, his first socialistic novel, and attempted to apply his romanticism to the workmen's movement, the critics found that this was the end, for he had outwritten himself. Naturally, as he became an objective, realistic artist they understood him still less, and more and more frequently he was asked: "What is your belief?" Gorky replied with generalities which could be interpreted as a condemnation of the Bolsheviks, if so desired, and his visits to Russia were confined to triumphal processions and listening to official panegyrics.

Gorky was not "blatant," but Maiakovsky and his army of Futurists instead made twice the noise. Maiakovsky shouted louder

than anyone else trying to outdo the others, and the "roars and growls" of his poetry answered the requirements of clubs and cabarets. In fact, how could he avoid identifying himself with the revolution? Even before it he was the most radical of radicals, the most zealous destroyer of literary tradition, in a word, a revolutionary. He now proclaimed loudly: "Only the proletariat will create new things, and we, the Futurists, are the only ones to follow in the footsteps of the proletariat. . . . Futurism—is the ideology of the proletariat. . . . Futurism—is proletarian art." Hence the deduction: "There is not, and cannot be any other artistic power, but that of the minority, and in order to instill extreme radical art into the masses it was essential that a dictatorship of the Futurist minority should be established." This claim took literature unawares. While others remained noncommittal and hesitated to follow the new régime, the Futurists demonstratively stretched out their hands and offered the authorities their coöperation in exchange for the dictatorship in art. "As the authorities required organizers and leaders during the first, destructive period of their work, this rôle was assigned to Futurism. From their bohemian life in the cellars the Russian Futurists were transferred to the magnificent halls of the Academies" (Viacheslav Polonsky).

But theirs was not a lasting victory, for having seized the power they failed to profit by it. Their poetry had little in common with Marxism, and when it came to defining the positive aim of the new art of the future, the Futurists declared:

The bourgeois artists copied the trees, the sun, the mountains, etc. Why? All this exists . . . and is a thousand times more beautiful than when daubed on canvas or hewn out of sugary blocks of marble. . . . If you are artists . . . then create your own, human objects. . . . Factories, mills, and workshops are waiting for artists to appear and supply them with new models of objects never seen before.

Everything old must be wiped out.

The authorities, however, soon grasped the situation. When faced with these manifestations of "artistic hypocrisy" and "imitation of the West," Lenin, being a realist, had the courage to declare



himself a "barbarian." "I understand Pushkin and appreciate both him and Nekrasov," he said, "but as to Maiakovsky, I am sorry, I do not understand him." In 1921 another group, the Proletcult,<sup>4</sup> advanced its claim to represent "proletarian art," and passed the following resolution: "As we consider Futurism an ideological trend of the last period of imperialistic, bourgeois culture, we proclaim it antagonistic to the proletariat as a class." Futurism in its capacity of an officially approved school was taken from its pedestal, but it did not at once capitulate. In the Moscow cafés Vladimir Shershenevich and Marienhof, two gifted offspring of Futurism, were "astounding" the public with their songs. They were propagating the new variation of Futurism—Imaginism, or the predominance of the image in poetry as opposed to the symbol, which (for the Symbolists) was a method of thinking or a conception of the world, while the image was but a literary means for intensifying the visual impression. At the lowest ebb of his career Serge Esenin also temporarily joined the Imaginists, thinking thereby to become a part of the revolution. Later he regained the peak of his creative genius through the bitter disappointment of being torn away from the soil. ("Why the devil did I shout so loudly of being on friendly terms with the people; my poetry is no longer needed here.") This feeling eventually led him to suicide. Maiakovsky, left alone, soon followed Esenin's example.

After the fall of the Futurists the Proletcult presented its claim to power. This movement was associated with the name of Gorky's collaborator, the philosopher A. Bogdanov, who tried to reconcile materialism with critical philosophy. There was more foundation in his claim to represent the embryonic proletarian literature than in that of the Futurists. Bogdanov believed that the proletariat's mission in the world was to establish a "harmonious and complete organization of the entire life of humanity." The accomplishment of this mission necessitated independent cultural efforts from the proletariat "beyond the reach of any decrees," i. e., not relying on state patronage, but on free and spontaneous activity. The Futurists were willing to serve the proletarian state as one of its subsidiary organs, but the Proletcult went further than this by de-

<sup>4</sup> Abbreviation for "proletarian culture."—Ed.

manding complete "separation" from the state machine, so as to work out immediately the purely "socialistic" forms of thought, feelings, and life, independent of the coördination and combination of various social forces, which at that time the Soviet power was still bound to consider.

The Proletcult wanted to control unrestrictedly the management of all the branches of proletarian art—literature, pictorial and plastic arts, music, the theater, as well as every cultural and educational work, the education of Communist youth, etc. State institutions were only to "render every possible assistance to the new movement," which was to have an independent position along with the political and economic movements (Resolution of 1918). The All-Russian Council of the Proletcult, with its studios and laboratories for the production of proletarian literature, was to be the center of this independent organization, and it had to assume the form of an "All-Russian Union of Workmen Writers," bound to "unite all the writers of the laboring class who upheld the proletarian stand." The aim of the union was "to create a proletarian socialistic literature, both artistic and scientific, answering to the ideals of the revolutionary communistic proletariat."

Although the "theoretical" claims of the Proletcult were somewhat moderated by Bogdanov's successors, P. I. Lebedev-Poliansky and V. Pletnev, its inclusive demands nevertheless continued to be excessive and could not depend upon the sympathy and support of the centralized Soviet power. In addition to the fact that this power could tolerate no authority but its own in the management of proletarian culture, there arose a series of objections of a practical and theoretical nature. In the first place the Proletcult could never have mastered the entire sphere to which it made claim. Later, when the unions of proletarian writers were formed, they made it their task to organize proletarian literature independently of the central group of the Proletcult. All that was left for the "central arena" of the Proletcult were the workmen's theater—a very modest enterprise—and a few theatrical and literary studios. Further than this, from their very inception Bogdanov's views provoked theoretical objections from his constant opponent, Lenin, who frankly derided the idea of creating a proletarian culture by laboratory methods.

Practically all the phrases about proletarian culture are only a blind for the struggle against Marxism. . . . To enable art to reach the people, and the people to approach art, we must first raise the general level of education and culture. . . . Of course, we are waging war against illiteracy and sending itinerant exhibitions and educational trains throughout the country [Lenin said to Clara Zetkin] but what can this bring to a population of many millions deficient in the most elementary knowledge and rudiments of culture? For at the very time when here in Moscow a few tens of thousands of people are enjoying a brilliant theatrical performance, throughout the country millions of people are still striving to learn arithmetic and how to spell their names, and have to be told that the earth is not flat but round and that the world is governed by the laws of nature instead of by witches and sorcerers jointly with the Heavenly Father.

All this was obviously far removed from the establishment of a proletarian culture, and, moreover, was it possible to deny the old art? We have seen that when it came to a choice between Pushkin and Maiakovsky Lenin favored Pushkin. "Art is the property of the people. Its deepest roots must spread into the thick of the vast mass of working people. It must be understood by these masses and only by them. The people can understand Pushkin and Tolstoy, but how could they understand the affectations of a Futurist? Why should one admire the new only because it is new?" Lenin again said to Clara Zetkin. "Nonsense, sheer nonsense. . . . We are good revolutionaries, but I do not know why we should feel obliged to prove that we are on a level with modern culture. I have the courage, rather, to declare myself a barbarian." "It is too soon for us to dispose of what we have inherited from the bourgeois," he said in the winter of 1919, when voting against the closing of the Grand Theatre in Moscow.

None of this could assure success either to the Proletcult or Futurism, when competing for domination in literature and art. Moreover, there appeared now a third rival prepared to quote an actual fact in support of its claim. It was too late to doubt the existence of a proletarian literature or only to prepare for its establishment. The proletarian literature existed. Wanting to prove it by deeds, the poets of the working class formed their own soci-

ety which became known under the picturesque name of the Forge.

In May of 1920 the Forge published the first issue of its magazine, and the Proletcult assembled an All-Russian Congress of Proletarian Writers, at which twenty-five cities were represented by 150 authors, of whom forty joined the Forge. The majority of these writers belonged to the urban working and artisan classes, though many had been born and spent their childhood in villages. Many took part in the political struggle and experienced the hardships of the underground revolutionary work, of prison, and exile. Even before the revolution the leaders of the Forge had begun to write and publish their works, and by 1923 had gained recognition. Notwithstanding the pronounced individual character of each poet, the members of the Forge met on a common ground—the enthusiasm aroused by the triumphal progress of their party. The members first proclaimed themselves the advanced guards of the proletariat, and then, in the flowery declaration of 1923, “the only union adhering wholly to the program of the revolutionary vanguard of the working class and the Workmen’s and Peasants’ Party—the shock brigade in the first line of the ideological front.” In this capacity they felt called upon to eulogize the city and the factory as bearers of the great proletarian future.

During the years of war and of victory it was natural for the representatives of the leading revolutionary class to have this frame of mind. But Voronsky, the critic, soon pointed out to the Forge that their poetical posters were too abstract, that in their verses neither the concrete Russian factory nor the individual Russian workman was represented true to life. As to the life or destiny of the Communist Party—there was no mention of it. Yet a correct explanation for this was supplied by Voronsky: the poets of the Forge belonged to the generation born in the latter part of the eighteen-eighties; they had developed outside the party circles and under extraneous ideological influences originating with the peasant and intellectual writers. They had not entirely broken with the village life, and while loudly, exaggeratedly eulogizing the factory, its benches, machines, and driving belts, they continued to look back with regret and longing to the countryside. These people were bored with factory life during the pre-revolutionary

days, and if in the whirlpool of the revolutionary struggle they ever succeeded in forgetting their longing it was for a short time only.

The frame of mind and poetry of the Forge came to an abrupt end when War Communism was replaced by the NEP. In 1921 and 1922 there was a serious crisis in the history of Soviet literature. The whole situation was suddenly complicated, for, profiting by the régime of comparative freedom, the groups which till then had sought refuge from the storms of life, reëntered the literary field, and the struggle for supremacy was resumed in a new setting and by new methods. We must stress the point that while grandiloquent lyrics corresponded to the period of struggle, the period of truce was marked by the return to humble prose. The change in form led to a change in the contents. Prose, by reason of its very nature and its ability to embrace a wider range of artistic subjects, had to assert its claim to emancipation from politics or at least from direct allegiance to it and its immediate interference with literature—which was precisely the aim set by the Forge.

The elder men of letters, who had been silent during the hungry and cold winters of 1918-19, were the most insistent upon preserving independence from politics. In 1919 "Alkonost" published the *Memoirs of Dreamers* (8 vols.) edited by Andrey Bely, and in 1921 *The House of Art* (2 vols.) under the editorship of Maxim Gorky, Dobuzhinsky, Zamiatin, and Chukovsky. The *Literary Herald*, a weekly magazine, was also published in 1919-22 and was replaced first by the *Annals of the House of Writers* and later by *Literary Notes*. Though these publications were in a minor key and obliged to use a muted language, the general attitude of the group towards contemporary reality was quite clear: it could only be a negative one. "Everything in our life is at a crisis," wrote Viacheslav Ivanov (b. 1866) <sup>5</sup> in the first issue of the *Memoirs of Dreamers*. "Where is the accustomed face of things? We cannot hear the familiar voice. Humanism is dying." "I fear that we shall never have a genuine literature," said Zamiatin <sup>6</sup> in *The House of Art*. "Contemporary reality has greatly tried us, the long-suffering members of the Russian intelligentsia," wrote the anonymous

<sup>5</sup> One of the leading poets and theoreticians of the Symbolist school.—Ed.

<sup>6</sup> E. Zamiatin (1884-1937), a well-known novelist.—Ed.

author of an article in *Literary Notes* (1921). "Pecuniary privation and physical pain are as nothing compared with spiritual agony. . . . With what joy did the intellectuals greet the revolution, how ardently did they believe that it would put an end to their estrangement from the people. How bitterly mistaken they were. . . . Three years of civil war . . . forced the intelligentsia to alter its opinion of the masses." The disillusionment in the people gradually became general and was followed by the intellectuals' disappointment in themselves. "Since we have been so cruelly mistaken . . . we are not worthy to be the builders of a new edifice and the explorers of new paths. . . . It only remains for us to fold our arms and surrender ourselves and our fatherland to the course of events."

In this funereal mood any constructive work in the creation of new forms of life was impossible. But not all the representatives of the old intelligentsia, and especially not all their young followers, dwelt in this mood. The state of complete confusion prevailing in this group, and the "cosmic" enthusiasm of the Forge represented two extreme positions. We shall subsequently see that both were gradually modified and in converging the two extreme points of view created a number of intermediate positions—of an equally transitional nature. This, of course, does not quite apply to the émigré writers, because they did not have to face the principal incentive of this internal evolution—the immediate presence of the Soviet government. Nevertheless, in Russia as well as abroad, the general trend of the literary development was the same. In both cases alike the older generation of prose writers succeeded in sustaining the artistic realism of the classical period, notwithstanding the great difference in the political tendencies of Bunin and Kuprin, on the one side, and of Veresaev and Serafimovich on the other. It is true that for a long time the poetry of the émigrés retained both decadent form and decadent mood, but this was not characteristic of the general trend in literature, which showed an increasing inclination towards realism.

The first sign of this tendency, in Soviet Russia, was the appearance of a group of young writers, who called themselves Serapion Brothers. The name was taken from the title of a volume of fantastic stories written by E. T. A. Hoffmann, the German

Romanticist of the early nineteenth century, who gave this name to his work to commemorate the circle of his intimate friends who met at his house on St. Serapion the Anchorite's day. But essentially these Russian writers had little in common with the Romantics. They were brought together at the lectures in the House of Art, and then they decided to meet at the house of M. Slonimsky (b. 1897), a man of culture, and read their works to one another. However, the real guiding spirit of the circle was L. N. Lunz (b. 1901), a youth also of a high degree of culture and a lecturer on Western European literature at the St. Petersburg University. Upon his premature death (1924) the Serapions dispersed, but Lunz's spirit and motto, "To the West," were preserved by the individual members of the circle.

In adopting the name of Serapion Brothers the members considered themselves in an oasis of culture surrounded by a desert, and therefore they placed themselves under their anchorite patron for protection against the realities of life. Lunz thus described the founding and the aim of the circle:

In February of 1921, a period of the strictest regulation, registration, and organization, when all were subordinated to an exhausting iron rule, we decided to meet without rules, chairmen, votes, or elections. We became friends during revolutionary days, the days of the severest political tension. In both right and left wings it was said: "Whoever is not with us, is against us. With whom are you? With the Communists or against the Communists? With the revolution or against the revolution?" We are with Serapion the Anchorite, was our answer. Each of us has his own ideology and his own political views, each paints his hut in his own color. So it is with our stories, novels, and dramas, but there is one thing that is demanded of all of us: that the voice should ring true, that we should believe in the reality of the production irrespective of its color. And now when the fanatical politicians and the short-sighted critics of the right or the left wing attempt to sow discord among us, emphasizing our divergent ideologies and cry out: "Let every one follow his own party"—we only ignore them. For while one brother worships God and another the devil, they still are brothers.

Therefore the basic principle of the Serapion aesthetics required that the "work should be original, realistic, and have a peculiar

life of its own." "Art is as realistic as life, and like life it has no aim or reason: existing simply because it must exist."

Evidently this was the best and easiest method for protecting the position of artistic realism against the exigencies of contemporary politics. Here the theoretical stand against political slogans in literary criticism was connected with the practical task of protection against the critical attack of the Marxists. This attitude was expressed very vividly by N. Nikitin (b. 1897), a member of the circle, in the symposium published under the title of *Writers' Views on Art and on Themselves* in 1924. He wanted to be "one of the working class, and at the same time a heretic, otherwise it is impossible to conceive art as one of the absolutes of freedom." He did not want to be "dragged about by the scruff of the neck" and was dissatisfied because the Russian critics—both modern and old—applied a social "ammeter to every line an author wrote." Art has its "own ear" and plays its "own game," and the artist must not be a "public seismograph." This statement, however, was mitigated by another: "No one must ever worry, the artist will always be loyal to everything that is progressive in his time, he never was and never will be mercenary."

Nikitin and Zoshchenko (b. 1895), were among the original members of the Serapion circle, but soon there appeared new ones: V. Kaverin (b. 1902), a graduate of the University and historian of literature, who from "fantastic tales" passed to "realistic material"; Vsevolod Ivanov (b. 1895), acrobat, clown, and faker in a circus, who became a typesetter, and later was initiated by Gorky into literature; K. Fedin (b. 1892), a peasant acclimated to city life, who was educated at the Commercial School in Moscow, spent the years from 1914 to 1918 as a war prisoner in Germany, where he applied himself as a musician, chorister, and actor, and, on his return to Russia, through Gorky and the Serapions, became a man of letters; and the last to join the circle—N. Tikhonov (b. 1896).

Thus in the Brotherhood of the Serapions two currents were merged—one from above and another from below—with correspondingly different levels of education and divergent political views: on the one side were Lunz, Slonimsky, Zoshchenko, Kaverin, and Nikitin, and on the other V. Ivanov, Fedin, and Tik-



honov. But even Lebedev-Poliansky, their opponent, rendered them full justice: "They are neither proletarians nor peasants—they are working intelligentsia; they did not flee, like their fathers, from the rumblings of the proletarian revolution, but faced the storm." Nevertheless, they were realistic writers, who cherished their artistic independence. Michael Zoshchenko, son of a painter of noble birth, the graduate of a classical school and university, and a true intellectual, was the most popular of them all. His humorous works were to be found on every newsstand, they were read in alehouses, in street cars, in third-class railway-carriages, and his stories were repeated on the stage and over the air. He profited by the advent of readers from the uneducated and semi-educated masses, and his style became a mixture of popular dialects and distorted literary language.

The Brotherhood of Serapions was soon compelled to yield its place to a new group which, however, was forced to renounce absolute neutrality and to make an advance towards the new "tutors." Following in the footsteps of the Serapions there came the so-called "Fellow Travelers," consisting partly of the same people. But their name was not of their own choice, it was given them by Trotsky in his critical review of revolutionary literature, where he likewise gave a characterization of the group from the point of view of a Soviet leader:

They are neither selfish literary opportunists, attempting to picture the revolution, nor are they political converts, for in their case no break with the past and no radical change of front is required. Their literary and spiritual outlook was shaped by the revolution. At the same time they are sharply differentiated from the Communists. . . . They are not the artists of the proletarian revolution, but only its artistic fellow travelers."

The Fellow Travelers lacked even the degree of unity that was present in the Serapion Brothers. In this new group the former Serapions, V. Ivanov, Fedin, Kaverin, and Tikhonov, were associated with such individual writers as Pilniak (b. 1894), Babel (b. 1894), Seifulina (b. 1889), Leonov (b. 1899), A. Malyshkin (b. 1890), S. Semenov (b. 1893), and Budantsev (b. 1896). Later they were joined by A. Tolstoy (b. 1882), I. Ehrenburg (b. 1891),

V. Veresaev (b. 1867), M. Prishvin (b. 1873), and V. Lidin (b. 1894), all authors whose works had been known prior to the revolution. Eventually, to be a member of a group in a measure recognized by the authorities, partially guaranteed their safety. The list of the Fellow Travelers included the names of the most eminent writers who had given the literature of the Soviet period not only a national but also a European reputation. What talent there was in this literature during the years 1922-25 came from the Fellow Travelers. We shall return to some of these writers, but in the meantime it must be pointed out that their advent and their literary work aroused approbation and support along with an acute animosity from the opposite camp of proletarian writers. This struggle was conducted like a literary debate until the authorities finally interfered, and it ended in a compromise, the terms of which were dictated by the resolution of the conference called in May 1924 by the Press Department, and the subsequent decisions of the Thirteenth Congress and the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Party.

Simultaneously an evolution was taking place in the opposite literary camp of proletarian writers. Of the three unsuccessful claimants to power in literature, the Futurists who led the way were the first to be defeated. They were reluctant to leave the stage without establishing an original literature or at least a literary school. But there already existed a school very like the Futurists—the Formalists, who back in 1916 had formed a Society for the Study of Poetical Language, with the object of directing the new “literary science” towards an exclusive study of literary forms while practically ignoring the content. A literary work was to be approached as a technical production, and every explanation founded on the biography of the author, his social surroundings, the public spirit of his time, etc., was to be eliminated. Perhaps the passion for this manifestly one-sided view could also be regarded as a shield against the intrusion of contemporary reality into the realm of artistic activity, or as a veiled defense of “pure” art. But Professor Pereverzev, the leader of the school, who successfully gathered together a group of disciples, attempted to link this stand for the autonomy of art with a simplified Marxist interpretation. Accepting the principle that thought is conditioned by exist-

ence, he argued that by directly studying the form of a literary work it was possible to base one's conclusion as to the social group in which the author belonged, and what economic interest he represented.

The Futurists however, were not satisfied with the complex teachings of the Formalist school, and founded the so-called LEF (Left Wing) through which they bequeathed to posterity a more specific and concise adaptation of the formal method that particularly emphasized Constructivism, a doctrine reducing literature to the creation of objects of immediate need. Art was a craft which the artist must adapt directly to the needs of industrial production, thus, in a quasi-Marxist way, connecting art with the technical-economic base. In this conception literature was confined, strictly speaking, to newspapers, to the publishing of facts, because the Leftists, on principle, repudiated fiction in literature. "To learn from the classics" meant writing on reactionary subjects and indulging in psychology and romanticism, every trace of which had to be eliminated. Of course, in the opinion of the Leftists, the Fellow Traveler writers were guilty of all these sins.

Under the NEP, Proletcult, the second contender in the struggle for power, also faded away. In 1922 its studios rapidly declined in number, yet in dying the Proletcult left an offspring—and a most quarrelsome one at that. It was a group which in 1923 first published a magazine under the characteristic name of *On Guard*. The young element in this circle was composed of "Komsomols" (Communist Youth), who according to Trotsky were "our own, October's—to the very last fiber." The poets A. Bezymensky (b. 1898), K. Doronin (b. 1900), and S. Malakhov (b. 1902), Libedinsky (b. 1898), a gifted prose writer, and Lelevich, a talented critic, were the founders of *On Guard*, and their peculiar psychology and political features were ably described by the critic Voronsky:

During October and afterwards during the period of the civil war, a great many partisan youths, forming a heterogeneous lot, joined our party. There were several workmen, but the offspring of peasants, petty bourgeois, and the democratic class of the intelligentsia (clerical workers, etc.) prevailed. They had passed through the cruel training of civil war and had acquired wide knowledge from the rank and file of the Communist Party, but they had no solid

bond with the life of the workmen. They had had no experience in the old school of underground revolutionary work. While the war was being waged they had no time to study Marxism seriously, but they are doing it now. This generation . . . had borne arms, and from its midst came the "politruks" (political instructors) and regimental commanders; . . . it fought the battles of Petersburg, Orel, and Rostov, . . . it led a camp and nomadic life . . . but now instead of carrying a heavy rifle these youths handle the pen and paper. They are strong, hardy, . . . eager, mirthful, conceited, and resolutely self-reliant. They are accustomed to taking everything by storm: so give them Europe, give them schools, science, and art. They abound in youthful enthusiasm, and they are reluctant either to estimate their own strength soberly or to set themselves any limits. . . . Rather unmannerly, they step on your feet, they spit, and they talk arrogant nonsense.

On the return of this generation from the war it noticed that something was wrong with literature, and so decided to deal in its own way with those disturbing the Communist order.

As to the fate of the Forge, the third claimant to power, its "cosmic enthusiasm" met with the disapproval of the new proletarian writers. In 1923 Bezymensky wrote to the poets of the Forge: "Enough of heaven and wisdom's matter.—Give us plain nails, aplenty of the latter.—Overthrow heaven. Fling wisdom aside.—Give us earth—and living men beside." In other words, one must be able to discover revolution in the midst of everyday drudgery. But the poets of the Forge in their exalted mood failed to do it. They thought the NEP a fraud, almost a treason on the part of the government.

These poets were all workmen, but none of them members of the party. The Communist Youth back from the front, on the contrary, were all party men, yet had no connection with the workmen. The appearance of this generation replaced the Forge, which was extremely opportune for the authorities. Thus the third claimant to the literary power of the pre-NEP period lapsed into the past.

What did the young generation of the Communist Youth and the Red Army men contribute to literary life? It not only renewed the claims of Bogdanov and the Proletcult to dictatorship, but also enlarged upon the subject. It repudiated even those modest con-

cessions which Bogdanov was prepared to make to old literature, and instead of insisting upon the right of an independent literary organization, it demanded that the dictatorship over literature should be surrendered directly to the party. In order to unite for struggle the young people formed two separate groups: "October" and "Young Guards." The October group subsequently organized the VAPP (All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers), for which it demanded the delegation of dictatorial power. The ultra-radical stand of the Communist Youth was outlined in the planks of their platform and in the resolution of the First All-Union Conference of the VAPP. A formula was developed which became quite current: "That literature is proletarian which organizes the psychology and consciousness of the working class and the vast toiling masses towards meeting the final aims of the Proletcult, as the reorganizer of the world and founder of the communist society." A mere recognition of proletarian literature no longer was sufficient; it was obligatory to accept the principle of its hegemony and to struggle for "the absorption by it of every form and shade of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois literature." The domination of the proletariat was incompatible with that of non-proletarian ideology and of non-proletarian literature, therefore all talk of a peaceful collaboration between the two was a reactionary utopia. On the contrary, in the field of literature an "irreconcilable class struggle was taking place"; this was "the way by which the proletariat could seize power in the domain of art." From this point of view the entire literary past was declared counter-revolutionary, and the Fellow Travelers were the foremost counter-revolutionaries who, being imbued with the spirit of nationalism, imperialism, and mysticism, not only misrepresented, but often defamed the revolution.

This extreme attitude assumed by the On Guardists, the October, and the Young Guards provoked opposition even within the party circles. A. Voronsky, who in 1921 had been relieved of his military duties and had become the publisher of a periodical—*Red Virgin Soil*—assumed the leadership in this opposition. His aim was to reconcile all the literary talent to the revolution and to assemble it in his magazine. While blaming the writers of the

right wing for retiring, and accusing Bely and Zamiatin of their reactionary tendencies, Voronsky found, nevertheless, that to condemn all the "old men" without exception was unwise and wrong, for "their voices will still be heard, and they will yet have their say." He feared a break in the cultural continuity and he wanted the new writers to wage war "in the name of the glorious legacy of the past." Of course he soon realized that in the left camp there was more talk than artistic achievement, and that the majority of talent was to be found among the Fellow Travelers. Thus the *Red Virgin Soil* offered them refuge and printed many of their works. Voronsky's literary views came from Belinsky and Plekhanov,<sup>7</sup> but to him art like science was "knowledge of life" through feeling, imagination, and synthesis rather than by reason, abstraction, and analysis. Therefore artistic knowledge had to be objective and accurate. When the objective truth was disadvantageous to a given social class, some authors would misrepresent reality in accordance with their own tendencies, which resulted in pseudo-art and pseudo-science. The real artist, however, must possess, besides class ideology and class psychology, the elements of objective truth. Moreover, when a social class was at the height of its development, its ideology could be identical with the objective truth. Consequently, it was impossible to reject indiscriminately even bourgeois art. Placing stress on knowledge in art, as opposed to the organizational point of view of the On Guardists, Voronsky acquired a basis for supporting the Fellow Travelers as genuine artists. "In reproducing real life, in helping to acquire knowledge of it," he said, "they are able thereby to organize the psychology of the readers in the direction required by Communism." Thus Voronsky's basic criterion from a political gradually changed into an artistic one.

It was natural that with the advent of the young generation the controversy should grow extremely acute. Voronsky, though he patronized these youths, did not hesitate to censure their clannishness, their arrogant self-advertisement, and their "Communist

\* <sup>7</sup> On Belinsky, see above, Ch. II. G. Plekhanov (1857-1918), one of the founders of the Russian Social Democratic Party and the leading Marxist theoretician in Russia.—Ed.

bragging," and to place small value on their initial achievements. During the struggle he was forced to defend himself and to assume the offensive, and his position became even more definitely expressed:

There is no proletarian art in Russia . . . at best, there is only an art which is connected with the old. . . . Of course the proletarian, the bourgeois, and the petty-bourgeois apply art to varied and often contrary purposes, but this does not necessarily lead to the division of art, science, and culture into three categories—bourgeois, proletarian, and petty-bourgeois, because in fact until this moment only the culture, science, and art of the olden times exist. Man of the future social order will create his own art, culture, and science by founding them on the new material base. For the time being, during the present transitory period, especially in Russia the existing bourgeois culture is sufficient.

Voronsky was strong in his position not only because it was true in its essence, but also because he voiced the opinions of such influential party leaders as Trotsky, Bukharin, and Lunacharsky. Trotsky went much further than Lenin in his repudiation of a special proletarian culture. In his book *Literature and Revolution* he evolved the idea that the present was the moment for military struggle and not for the construction of culture, and that during this short transitory epoch of twenty or thirty or fifty years, which the proletarian world revolution would cover, "the proletariat will have no time to create its own culture." As to the cultural structure of the future, when the dictatorship is abolished, it will no longer have any class character, because all classes will be swept away. The construction of the bourgeois culture required no less than five centuries, so the proletariat, until it ceases to be a proletariat, must follow the one possible path—that of apprenticeship—of concrete cultural work aiming at the growth of literacy and education. The advanced members of the class could not by laboratory methods build up the new culture by themselves "behind the back of the masses."

Thus, in spite of his utopian starting point, Trotsky arrived at a conclusion which was in harmony with common sense. Among the workmen there could be individual poets, but that did not signify a class poetry. It was impossible to create a proletarian

literature by laboratory methods, as the On Guardists believed. In practice it meant also that "the field of art was not a domain where the party was called to give orders. And, of course, never could or would the party consider supporting the views of one literary circle . . . in competition with others." Bukharin also came to approximately the same conclusion, finding that the regulation of proletarian literature by state authority would mean its ultimate destruction, because it would be deprived of the opportunity to learn the lessons of life's struggle.

Lunacharsky, being more familiar with Western literature, came even closer to Voronsky's idea. "A talent, in our opinion, must always find justification no matter how it is applied," he said. Lunacharsky's indisputable merit lay in his endeavor to preserve the old art as the source of new creative activity. His chief principle was: "Everything of value produced by various nations in the course of many centuries constitutes the inalienable cultural treasure common to all mankind." During the revolutionary storm, and while the proletarian culture still was comparatively poor, one had to struggle "for the preservation of everything of value that was left us from the past after its terrible collapse, and for the clearing of paths to the future." From this standpoint Lunacharsky protested against the adherents of the Proletcult whose ambitions overreached their mental capacity, and against the On Guardists, who did not take into consideration the specific requirements of art. He likewise deplored the alienation from the party of the non-proletarian artists, who in most cases came from the intelligentsia.

The controversy became so acute and the claims of the On Guardists so arrogant that the government had to interfere. On May 9, 1924, the Press Department of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party called a conference at which Voronsky's views triumphed because they represented those of the government. At that meeting Averbach, the critic of the left, challenged Voronsky, saying: "In 1921 Voronsky was entrusted with a special task . . . the disintegration of the bourgeois writers, which he carried out in a short-sighted, most unsatisfactory manner . . . because he first disintegrated the proletarian writers." "We are talking of the stand taken not by me, but by our leading



organs of government," was Voronsky's bold reply, "for every few months I verify my methods and take counsel with the comrades, while the On Guardists behave foolishly and not only drive away the Fellow Travelers but the proletarian writers as well." In order to weaken the opposition, however, the writers of the Voronsky group addressed a collective statement to the conference, offering new concessions to the Communists. In the first place, they acknowledged that the way which contemporary Russian literature had to follow was that of the Soviet post-October Russia. While defending the artistic rights of individual writers to perceive and reflect reality in their own light, they emphasized that a great number of Communist writers and critics shared this view. Moreover, they welcomed the new writers, workmen and peasants, who were entering the literary field, and they denied the idea that they regarded these newcomers either as adversaries or antagonists. Admitting their own possible mistakes, they protested against the indiscriminate attacks of the On Guardists who dared to present their opinion as that of the entire Communist Party.

Obviously it was under the influence of these statements that the conference passed a resolution which, in principle, was a compromise, but in practice tended to favor the stand taken by Voronsky's group against the claims of the On Guardists. This same attitude of compromise was assumed by the Thirteenth Congress of the Communist Party, while the decision of the Central Committee of the Party (end of June 1925) developed it into a treatise on the policy of the party in the realm of artistic literature, where it was acknowledged that "we have entered the zone of cultural revolution" and that "the conquest of positions in the field of artistic literature sooner or later will become an accomplished fact." But this victory was assigned to an indefinite future. At the present time "it must be remembered that this problem is a far more complicated one than others presented to the proletariat for solution. . . . It must also be admitted that the class origin of art in general, and of literature in particular, is expressed in forms infinitely more varied than it is, for instance, in politics." As a result of this complexity a section of the old and new intelligentsia was attracted to the new bourgeoisie, while "the class which had been culturally repressed was not able as yet to work out its own

artistic form, its own style." Hence the practical deduction that it was necessary not to agitate class strife but to mitigate it. In order to live in harmony with the peasants and to permit partial co-operation with the bourgeoisie, the former must be "gradually remodeled," the latter "gradually replaced," and the intelligentsia "won over from the bourgeoisie."

The fact that the Fellow Travelers were "differentiated" and hesitant furnished the basis for hope of this conquest. It was only necessary to hew away the anti-proletarian and anti-revolutionary elements, to fight against the neo-bourgeois ideology among a section of the Fellow Travelers, and to show tolerance towards others—depending, however, upon their prompt adoption of the Communist ideology. Such a tactical and cautious attitude promised no future happiness for the Fellow Travelers, but the immediate and heaviest of all blows was dealt the On Guardists. In referring to them it was said that there was no hegemony of proletarian authors as yet, and that in order to earn for themselves the historical right to such hegemony they needed the assistance of the party. In the publishing business legalized monopoly was as inadmissible as the party's adherence to any particular literary trend. All efforts to create a "hot-house proletarian literature," in the stifling atmosphere of a single guild, were censured. The peasant writers were protected from the tutelage of the proletariat, and it was recommended that "the artistic literary images of the peasant writers should not be erased from their works." Finally, the attack against that Marxist criticism which assumed the tone of command in literature and was guilty of "pretentious, semi-literate and arrogant Communist bragging," was actually directed at the On Guardists. The latter were advised to study and to "check everything in their own midst which was uncultured and amateurish." This admonition was fortified by the statement that "the creation of a literature calculated to arouse the interest of the mass reader, i. e., the workmen and peasants," was a task for the future, and that "in order to work out a form which would be suitable and accessible to the millions, it was necessary to profit by all the technical achievements of the old craft."

## V

### THE LATEST PHASE

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THE period of the New Economic Policy came to an end in 1927. Literature and Soviet policy entered upon the third phase of its existence at the same time, following those of War Communism and of the NEP. It corresponded to the new phase in Stalin's policy, which required a greater emphasis on revolutionary enthusiasm, socialistic competition, and the direct collaboration of the writers in the struggle for the Five Year Plan. In the light of this policy all literary trends less radical than the VAPP (All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers) were liable to be accused of being politically suspect. Attention was centered now upon the RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) to which was assigned the task of "tearing away the masks" from the enemies of the proletariat. Prof. Pereverzev was the first victim to suffer from this command. All the rival proletarian critics united in a body to fight him. The pretext was found in *Literary Science*, a volume of articles written by his pupils and published in 1928 under his editorship. It was proved that under the guise of an orthodox Marxist, Pereverzev was protecting art for art's sake and that he repudiated the ideological and political functions of literature at the very moment when the proletariat throughout the world was engaged in a deadly struggle.

Having finished with Pereverzev, the accusers sought the enemies of the proletariat within their own ranks. This was not a difficult task, for among the members of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers there were people of diverse views. It was headed by the Libedinsky group, which had the support of the majority, and was based upon the compromise accepted by the

party in the resolution of June 1925. However, the group was inclined to interpret the party resolution from a moderate point of view and developed its own theory on the autonomy of art. Its first thesis was a demand for the replacement of the "stamp" (i. e., stereotype) in literature by an attempt to picture the social revolution in its everyday concreteness as revealed in the activities of living men. Hence, as an inevitable conclusion, there followed the second thesis: the necessity of disposing of the naturalistic tendency limited to a mere description of reality in its outward manifestations, and introducing instead a more profound psychological exposition of man's life. But in order to escape the dangers of psychology for psychology's sake, characteristic of some trends of bourgeois literature, it was stipulated that the proletarian writers were not to base their psychological analysis on the egocentric development of the individual, but on the exposition of man's inner nature as formed and developed under the influence of his social surroundings. The third thesis defended by the Libedinsky group was the necessity of learning from the classics, especially from Tolstoy.

These statements served the more radical minority as a target for subsequent attacks. In their opinion the "living man" of the On Guardists overshadowed the "class man." Psychology led to probing into the problems of family life, and thus diverted the people from fighting at various political fronts, while learning from the classics was actually reduced to Tolstoism. The opposition demanded that the offensive novels in which the living man was depicted against the background of a non-class family life be replaced by literary reports from different sections of the Communist front.

We shall now pass from the history of the various trends into which the Soviet writers were divided to the actual contents of Soviet literature. Here we again find a process of evolution closely following upon that of the Soviet policy. The period of poetic enthusiasm, heroic realism, and dreams of planetary dimensions corresponded to War Communism. The NEP was marked by a return to representations of everyday life and psychology, with the assiduous participation of the Fellow Travelers and writers alien to the Soviet spirit. Finally, Stalin's socialistic

construction coincided with the struggle among proletarian authors for and against artistic realism—a struggle which ultimately led to the literature being given a new and purely partisan command.

The subjects related to the World War and civil war were the most typical of the first period. These themes, so to speak, exhausted the prose literature of those days. Many of the authors had personally experienced the war, and their impressions were so recent and vivid that they could scarcely think or write of any other subject. All shades of literary views were set forth in these accounts of the war, since the authorities had had no time to impose any restrictions, and the various trends of thought had not yet been differentiated as they were later. Every stratum of society introduced the imprint of its own experience into the artistic description of the war epoch. Alexis Tolstoy, who during his emigration had unfolded the wide canvas of his *Wandering through Hell*, upon his return to Soviet Russia continued his epic under the title of *The Year Eighteen*. This shows that the author had assumed an artistic and objective attitude, yet the subject of his work continued to be the experiences of a "White" family and from the "White" side came also his knowledge of events. *The White Guard*, a novel by M. Bulgakov, who for a while had also been an émigré, was written in the same spirit and achieved great success with the public, which at that time still consisted largely of members of the set described in the novel. When it was adapted for the stage, under the name *The Days of the Turbins*, it enjoyed the same popularity chiefly because the author had introduced into his objective exposition a note of heartfelt sympathy for the victims of the upheaval. Sholokhov's (b. 1900) *And Quiet Flows the Don*, another wide canvas of war years, was unfolded much later and this time from a proletarian point of view. Nevertheless Sholokhov's objectivity, when describing the Cossacks' life of pre-war and pre-revolutionary days, his evident sympathy with these common people, who could not be inoculated with the Communist doctrine, aroused suspicion during the Stalin period, which increased as the author, in developing his plot, advanced further into the Communist revolution.

In his novel *The Impasse*, Veresaev followed an intermediate course between the vanquished and the conquerors of the civil war. His hero, Ivan Sartanov, a country physician and a Marxist (Menshevik),<sup>1</sup> like the author himself, occupied in the great struggle the same place as the departed souls of Dante's Purgatory, whom "Heaven rejected and sulphuric Hell did not accept." According to his daughter Katia, who also vacillated between Heaven and Hell, Sartanov was an honest, noble, steadfast, blameless man. He could not be reconciled to the October Revolution, which had "destroyed the sacred principles of democracy." In this novel Veresaev drew a most objective picture of the Crimea passing from the Whites to the Reds and from the Reds back to the Whites. This objectivity so confused the Soviet critics that they gave most contradictory interpretations of *The Impasse*.

Those who remained—and in part even fought—on the Bolshevik side of the barricade, naturally introduced a style of their own into war literature. Of this group Pilniak (b. 1894) was the offspring of the Russian intelligentsia—the younger generation of Symbolists. He was slightly mystical and aesthetic, a romanticist lost in the midst of reviving realism, and it was with dread that he accepted the revolution into the thick of which fate had led him. It was evident that at the first purge Pilniak, who had had no time for self-determination, would be mercilessly rejected. Even a moderate Marxist critic (V. Polonsky) was to pass a severe judgment upon him: "He has deceived everybody in pretending to be a revolutionary artist. . . . Not knowing the revolution he painted it in dark colors."

In contrast to Pilniak and rather unexpectedly, Serafimovich (b. 1863), the oldest of the writers to join the revolution, in his flexibility far surpassed his much younger contemporaries. He wrote the first large work of the civil war period—*The Iron Torrent*—a novel which the critics at once styled a pearl of creation. Later on they realized that Serafimovich had never written anything of importance before or since. But his description of the "unbridled torrent in which thousands of ragged soldiers, carts,

<sup>1</sup> Member of the relatively moderate wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party, opposed to the more radical Bolsheviks.—Ed.

peasant women, horses, and human passions were fused into a gigantic whole" was proclaimed "the best work written about the revolution" (Lvov-Rogachevsky).

We must now pass to another group of writers of a more proletarian type, the members of which most enthusiastically took an active part in the civil war. Vsevolod Ivanov was a nomad who had tramped the length and breadth of Siberia, tried his hand at many professions, and ended by becoming the first poet of the guerilla warfare. Like Serafimovich, he had no rivals during those early years (1921-23) and so gained fame quite easily. The success of his *Partisans*,<sup>2</sup> *Armored Train*, *Colored Winds*, and *Azure Sands*, however, was due as much to the accurate knowledge of Siberian life which he described as to his identification with his simple heroes. The communist "faith" did not and never could touch those peasants who believed that the "Tsar had sent the Bolsheviks to make life easier for the people," and who subjected themselves fatalistically to the leadership of party propagandists. But like animals, they fought bravely and blindly, and the author shared their rustic perception of the world. Being one of them, Ivanov did not embellish or belittle his heroes, but portrayed them as they were.

Artem Vesely (b. 1900) did not even possess the limited education enjoyed by Ivanov. His works were devoid of the latter's flowery, semi-decadent style. Instead we find a rich, racy vocabulary and syntax affording in its very crudeness ideal material for philologists and students of folklore. In *Russia Bathed in Blood* and other narratives his portrayal of the partisans was as elemental and as concrete and picturesque as his language. He himself was part of the events he described, and, notwithstanding the brutality of the war's atrocities pictured in his works, he disarmed the reader by the childish ingenuousness and placidity of his narrative. In *The Womb* Vesely described the disorganization in the army, the acts of violence and coercion committed by the deserting soldiers, and finally, the instinct of the peasant-householder which is aroused in the bestial soldier. In his works there was never a trace of intellectuality, idealization, or fiction, only life's realities. Artem

<sup>2</sup> "Partisans" is the name commonly given in Russia to members of guerilla bands.—ED.

Vesely's colorful design is persuasive and triumphs in its originality.

Babel, the author of *The Red Cavalry*, was a romanticist of refinement who depicted himself at the front as a mere observer. He looked at the war from a purely intellectual standpoint, and it was not until 1924 that he began to write of it, and then in an ironical manner reminiscent of Heine. Quasi-objectively and with an affected calm he presented, in a kaleidoscope of horrifying war scenes, the sharp contrast between the reflecting intellect and the brutal passions of man. In Babel's description Budenny<sup>3</sup> refused to recognize his cavalry, and resented the libel. One of the critics, N. Stepanov, remarked that Babel's romanticism was to a degree "a self-defense against the austere self-assurance and manliness of the proletarian revolution." Indeed the mask of romanticism and the imaginistic style disguised the true attitude of Babel's bespectacled, puny hero towards war. We feel genius in every line of this wonderful picture of life as drawn by a truly rare artist.

Fadeiev (b. 1901) wrote his famous novel *The Rout* in 1925-26, at a time when the old enthusiasm had disappeared and psychological analysis had become the order of the day. In his work Fadeiev portrayed the psychology of a collective hero, a band of civil war partisans, in its various manifestations: the simple and loyal sacrifice of the primitive men of the people, the organizing mind of an intellectual, and the pusillanimity and involuntary treachery of a dreamer. The primitive element was represented by the local peasants and miners, who joined the partisans in the hills of the Ussuri region. Their psychology was similar to that of the heroes of Ivanov and Vesely, but Fadeiev treated them much more individually, giving each one his own characteristics. The part of the instructor and the leader the author assigned to Levinson, a small, delicate Jew, the only one to realize what should be done and what was to be expected, who cleverly concealed his moments of doubt and weakness behind the mask of will power and heroism. By the side of this intellectual leader Fadeiev placed Mechik, a schoolboy and young dreamer, seeking heroic adventures in the guerilla band and finding instead the hardships of a

<sup>3</sup> A Red Cavalry commander during the civil war, at present one of the marshals of the Soviet Union.—ED.



half-savage life in the Siberian forest. This "representative of the corrupt intelligentsia," being alien to partisan psychology, at the tragic moment when the Whites surrounded the partisans deserted the outpost, which led to the destruction of the detachment. *The Rout* was acclaimed by the critics and the public as a model work of proletarian literature.

There remained one more method for the treatment of the rather outmoded war subjects, which was to approach them as authentic history. This method, which was partly adopted by Sholokhov in his novel *And Quiet Flows the Don*, was definitely accepted by Furmanov (b. 1891). The war had caught Furmanov at the time of his graduation from Moscow University; from 1915 to 1921 he spent all his time at the different fronts, first of the World War and subsequently of the civil war. In the meantime he changed from an anarchist to a member of the Bolshevik Party (1918) and became a commissar representing the Political Administration on the southeastern front. He died in 1926, an enthusiastic propagandist and firm believer in the final success of the red struggle. This did not, however, prevent him from being impartial in his description of the fighting masses and their leaders, and to remain scrupulously true to his notes and personal reminiscences of the war years. As a result Furmanov was able to give an historically authentic picture of the events in which he had participated. He revealed them in his two novels: *Chapaev* and *The Revolt*, which enjoyed popular success, but perplexed the critics, who were at a loss to classify them. As an example of Furmanov's objectivity we can cite his treatment of his hero, Chapaev, the famous partisan to whom he acted as nearest adviser:

Such a Chapaev could exist only in those days—he could not have lived at any other time: he was brought into the world by that mass, at that moment, and in that peculiar state. In him were accumulated and reflected, as in a mirror, the fundamental qualities of the semi-partisan army of the time—with its unbounded bravery, resolution, and endurance, as well as its inevitable cruelty and its grim customs.

Another type of objectivity—that of an artist—was represented by Leonov (b. 1899), a young writer of the Fellow Travelers group,

who chose as a plot for his novel *The Badgers* an episode from the history of the civil war waged, not at the front, but between two villages in the center of Russia. Leonov, son of a self-educated peasant and grandson of a small Moscow shopkeeper, was equally familiar with both city and rural surroundings. In his novel two brothers, of the Moscow merchant class, come into a primitive village, where one of them assumes the rôle of champion of the peasants in their struggle against the Soviet government, while the other becomes a Bolshevik workman. The collecting of the tax in kind, which is most vividly described, leads to a village riot and the slaying of the collector. The peasants join the deserters, the Red Army men also go over to them, and they all take refuge in the forest, living in badgers' burrows, until the arrival of a punitive expedition. Meanwhile demoralization sets in among the "Greens"<sup>4</sup> which leads to their ultimate defeat. On this canvas Leonov succeeded in painting a picture true to village life without being accused of showing partiality to the enemies of the Soviet government, although his sympathy is fairly evident from the very objectivity of his description.

Granting that both Fadeiev and Leonov already belonged to the second period of Soviet literature, with its realistic and psychological novels, it is F. Gladkov who, in all fairness, must be acknowledged its true representative. His novel *Cement* was singled out for having ushered in a new era. The precise novelty was that with Gladkov literature abandoned the civil war subjects and turned to the new acute problems of the day, and that this transition was accomplished by a proletarian writer. Gladkov definitely separated the individual from the collective and, as a follower of Dostoevsky, he applied himself to analyzing the inner feelings and spiritual conflicts of the individual in his new surroundings, and the part played by him in socialist construction. Later on the critics found the contents of *Cement* too romantic and its style decadent. In both respects Gladkov (b. 1883) was a true child of his generation. He was a homeless proletarian, who after his graduation from a public school was exiled to Siberia for being an active revolutionary. There he continued his self-education, and from the cruel

<sup>4</sup> The name of the "Greens" was given to the peasant guerilla bands who during the civil war fought against both the Reds and the Whites.—Ed.

lessons taught him by life he acquired a hatred for the rich and the tyrants as well as compassion for the oppressed. With the support of Gorky and Korolenko he began writing at an early age, but only in 1922 was his work noticed. His novel *Cement*, written in 1926, brought him renown as an outstanding proletarian author, and some publicity abroad. It contained the following double theme: the social heroism of Gleb Chumalov, a workman who on his return from the front finds the mill dilapidated and at a standstill and by his own efforts puts it into working condition; and the family drama—he finds his house quite neglected and Dasha, his wife, transformed from an assiduous housewife into a social worker. In his attempt to restore the mill, Gleb meets all kinds of obstacles: déclassé workmen, the sabotage of specialists, bureaucracy in the higher economic organs, and finally, the evils of the NEP and the bungling party purge. Because of his energy and the assistance of the chief engineer, who is devoted to the mill, Gleb overcomes all these obstacles. But he does not succeed in reestablishing his family life. Dasha insists on independence and absolute freedom in her relations with his friend Badin. She takes her little daughter Niurka to the Children's Home, where the child dies of undernourishment and lack of care. Gleb is so elated over the restoration of the mill that he becomes reconciled to all these facts—but not so the readers. One of them wrote: "Gladkov did not solve the family problem of the Soviet state; but that is not his fault, since life itself has not yet solved it."

The sex question was one of those which excited the greatest interest of the reading public in Soviet Russia. How could the theory of free love be reconciled with normal human relations? This problem gave rise to an extensive literature some of which encouraged the basest desires and instincts. S. Malashkin's (b. 1890) *The Moon on the Right Hand Side*, Gumilevsky's *Dogs' Alley*, and P. Romanov's (b. 1889) *Without Cherry Blossoms* were the three most sensational works of this type. The heroine of Malashkin's novel, Tania, the daughter of a *kulak*, is a member of the Communist Youth, a propagandist among the workmen, and a student. Unable to withstand the reproaches that to refuse love is bourgeois, she yields and in the atmosphere of wantonness surrounding her "soon reaches her twenty-second husband."

Finally nature and a pure love save her from suicide. Gumilevsky justified sexual license on physical grounds. The love in Romanov's story *Without Cherry Blossoms* was equally divested of all its romantic aura. A girl student tells her friend of the disgusting relations among men and women students, and to prove it cites her own experiences. Although these stories did not rise above the level of common pornographic literature, they provoked endless arguments among the young people. To protect the youth from such "slander" a questionnaire was submitted to the students of the Sverdlovsk and the Moscow State Universities, the results of which were published and showed that 86 percent of the men and 74 percent of the women students in the first institution, and 72 percent of the men and 82 percent of the women in the second were for a "lasting love" as against the adherents of casual sexual intercourse.

Of course the sex problem was not confined within the limits of student life, where conditions though abnormal were merely temporary. It was necessary to solve that more general question of family life under new conditions, and to this end Soviet literature presented a number of stories and novels treating of family tragedies which resulted from the new ideas on matrimony. The difficulties began just when the young people, and particularly the Communist youth, entered upon an independent life. Here for example is a drama of pure love destroyed by the harsh interference of new ideas. Two members of the Communist Youth, Alexander and Niurochka (in Semenov's *Natalie Tarpov*), love each other and wish to marry. But in Alexander's presence his fiancée becomes the chance victim of his friend. The fiancé had no right to interfere, because she is a free woman. For a month Niurochka is in despair and then she secretly goes to an ignorant midwife and dies following an unskilfully performed operation. Alexander is heartbroken, yet in response to Niurochka's pleas for forgiveness at her deathbed he mutters: "But you are innocent, don't you remember that I said: 'You are free, you are a free individual. I had no right to interfere, had I?'" In this case the author obviously holds the corrupter subject to moral censure, but according to the new ideas the latter should have triumphed and felt himself justified. So it is in Karpov's novel *The Fifth Love*.

Serge Medvedev, a Communist and Red commander, returns to his village. He is a loyal partisan, believes in the revolution, and establishes in his village a school, a coöperative store, a Communist Youth Club, and a theater. But he is a philanderer and debauchee. Under the influence of liquor and at the instigation of a kulak he kills the village reporter, who is working on a Communist newspaper, and is brought to trial. Of course, the counsel for the defense enumerates his many merits as a member of the party, while the prosecuting attorney introduces his love affairs and declares that in living with several women and persuading them to be unfaithful to their husbands Medvedev was ruining family life. To this the counsel for the defense replies: "He may live with ten women as long as he pays alimony in compliance with the Soviet law. As to the destruction of the family, it is actually the peasant family that forms the principal obstacle to the collectivization of the villages. . . . What would have happened if Serge instead of disrupting the family had become a model family man and a believer in God? Then everything would have remained as it was, while now, being a partisan and member of the Communist Youth he introduces into the village the new ideas on matrimony—and thus helps to destroy the old principles." Lydia Seifullina in her novel *Manure* made Safron, a drunken veteran of the World War, play the same part in his village. From a beggar he becomes a local political leader, enlists all the peasants in the Bolshevik Party, organizes a commune, and then ravishes a school teacher and kills a doctor. An absolute ignoramus in Communist doctrine, he nevertheless brings "new ideas" to the village. True, the author condemned Safron to a horrible death at the hands of the Cossacks.

It was far easier than in the sore question of marriage, to draw a boundary line between the old and the new in the characterization of the people of the past and those of the present. In the works of the Soviet writers the "superfluous" people, consisting chiefly of the old intelligentsia, played an important part. The writers showed no mercy to those people—the "Hamlets," quite unfitted for the new conditions of life. In Ognev's (b. 1890) *Diary of Kostia Riabtsev* Shakhov, an intellectual poet, writes to his Communist friend: "You are a creature without angles, as round and oily as

a croquet ball, and so can pass through every wicket, . . . while I am a triangle. One of my angles is in the past, another in the present, and the third in the future. I cannot rid myself of the past . . . I cannot be absorbed in the present . . . and the future to me is senseless. . . ." Finally he commits suicide. But there were others who knew how to adapt themselves to the new conditions. In the same *Diary* Ozerov, a teacher, says: "They have become so hardened that for the sake of money they are ready to jump at each others' throats, lead intrigues, grovel on all fours before the mighty, plunder everything within the reach of their hands, and having served a term in prison are prepared to start all over again." However, not all the old intelligentsia perished or groveled, nor did all of them emigrate. Without the specialists such as officers of the army and navy, physicians, teachers, financiers, economists, and agronomists, the Bolsheviks could not have organized either their national economy or their political régime. Consequently the Soviet writers had to make exceptions of some of the intelligentsia, though these exceptions were rare. Usually when describing the intellectuals, even those willing to coöperate, they represented them as unskilful, weak, or treacherous. Fedin made a more serious attempt to deal with the "superfluous" people in his books *Cities and Years* and *Brothers*, the main subject of which was the attitude of the intellectuals towards the revolution. Some of Fedin's heroes accepted the revolution gradually, others were suddenly converted, while still others remained on this side of the barricade, and this type aroused the author's greatest interest. Some of these perished, like Andrew Startsev in *Cities and Years*, who fell victim to his own spiritual faltering. In *Brothers*, however, we see intellectuals who are capable of taking a definite stand. One of the Karev brothers is a composer, the other becomes a Bolshevik. Rodion, the Bolshevik, works for the revolution, while Nikita, the composer, creates a marvelous symphony which promises to bring him world renown. He says to his brother: "Let each of us follow his own path. I cannot, nor do I want to occupy myself with anything but my work. I am unable to renounce it; otherwise my earlier life would have been utter folly, while now it seems to me to be full of meaning." In the same novel Professor Bach, in talking with Rodion, emphasizes the fact that the peculiar sense of beauty which

his generation was able to enjoy could never be regained, and that the members of this generation would probably prove to be the last individuals of a dying species. Nevertheless, he refuses to acknowledge defeat. "We bear in our hearts feelings against which you are fighting, not because they are harmful, but because you yourselves do not possess them." He does not believe in the final destruction of beauty. "We have the right," he says, "to safeguard our emotions and to transmit them to you."

For all that, life passed by these exclusive natures. Nikita's symphony is a tremendous success, but he has so "impressed it with everything great brought about by the revolution" that "in his soul there is no strength for life," and Irene, who had worshiped him, leaves him for Rodion, the Communist.

It is important to observe that the "superfluous" people of the Soviet period were not confined solely to the old intelligentsia. The persecutions of the faltering people, those who became disillusioned with the Soviet ideals, the "tearing off of masks," and the party purges, created a new type of "superfluous" people from among the working class.

Both the left and the right wing of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers were forced to acknowledge that of all the subjects in proletarian literature that of a workman, the "builder of life" and creator of socialism, was presented in the most ineffectual manner. Even the hero of Gladkov's *Cement* was found unsatisfactory, and the author was accused of indulging in abstractions, decadence, and romanticism. Of highest importance were a picture of a living man and a literary portrayal of a workmen's collective; but for some reason neither could be obtained. The critics of the left, like Gorbachev, explained the failure by many deviations in the ranks of the proletarian writers. All these literary deviations obliterated the strictly proletarian line, and at the same time the ability to depict an ideal workman was lost. Indeed it appeared impossible to accomplish the task.

Some of the Soviet critics singled out Chumandrin as "an artist of the industrial life, a poet of the bench-workers, and a portrayer of that stratum of the working class which is the very support of the Communist Party and the revolution." It is true that in Chumandrin's novels, *The Mill* and *Ex-Hero*, written in compliance

with the party command, a workmen's collective is depicted against the background of factory life. Significantly, however, the interest is centered not on the positive types, but on exposing the "unmagnetized" characters gradually retiring from factory life, in other words on the new "superfluous" people. The most curious is that the "disintegrated" Communist Fedor Gorbachev (the ex-hero) is victor in a party dispute, while those representing the positive element are forced to leave the factory.

Still more difficult and delicate proved to be the task of picturing the Communist Party itself, and therefore this subject was carefully avoided in the works of the proletarian writers. Of course no criticism was allowed here; it was necessary to indulge in eulogies. Consequently a special interest was excited by Libedinsky's attempt to portray party members in accordance with his own theory, which, as we know, rejected all "stamps" and insisted on introducing living men into literature. True, by adopting the dialectical method he secured for himself the right to describe party members both in their positive and negative aspects. Libedinsky availed himself of this opportunity freely. We are not speaking of his first story, *The Week*, which brought fame to him and in which he, rather coarsely, divided the party members into sheep and goats, but of his far more ambitious work, *The Commissars*. Here the author assembled at a recapitulatory school course several Red commissars, who had lately gained fame by their military victories, but who showed their ignorance and inability to submit to discipline. With such a theme it was possible for the author to combine in a single temporary collective some most heterogeneous types. Libedinsky depicted them with great realism and talent, complying at the same time with the chief demands of proletarian literature. The characters were divided into three categories in accordance with their social origin: commanders and teachers from the working class, the peasants, and the intelligentsia. While the workmen were the "gold reserve" of the Soviet revolution, the intelligentsia represented a mere "paper currency issued against the gold reserve." They were either decadents or at best people who could not divest themselves of old seignorial habits. The peasants were treated no better. They were unreliable and likely to desert the party. Within the limits of his story



Libedinsky succeeded in saying much that was true and to show actually "living men" instead of manikins. But the critics, notwithstanding their respect for the proletarian writer, attacked him for the irreverent attitude he assumed towards the heroes of the civil war.

We must now pass to the peasant writers as a separate group. Their position, generally speaking, was a very difficult one. Lenin had proclaimed that nothing intermediate existed between the proletarian and the petty-bourgeois ideology. Contrary to this dictum the peasant writers claimed for themselves a special place on a level with the proletarians, and as time went on they wanted less and less to be associated with the bourgeois. One of the practical ways out of the difficulty for the individual peasant writers who had gained some renown was to join either the All-Union or the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. Likewise the peasant youths who entered higher educational institutions were gradually assimilated into proletarian surroundings. Those of the peasant writers who lived in large cultural centers became urbanized in their subject-matter, literary forms, and ideology. In this manner, to quote a Soviet author, the "reservoir of the peasant writers was something like a transitory stage." No wonder that under such conditions the peasant literature, in itself, was generally considered non-existent. Chumandrin, at the Leningrad Conference of Peasant Writers, delivered the following greeting: "Comrades, I am welcoming you and greeting you, but there is no peasant literature, never has been, and never will be any."

Yet, as early as 1921, a separate Union of Peasant Writers was organized, originating in the Surikov Circle.<sup>5</sup> At first the Union was far from willing to recognize the proletarian dictatorship, and it was not until May 1928 that it finally adopted the Bolshevik ideology. The new central committee of the organization established its own periodical, *Land of the Soviets*, which during the first four months of its existence received about two thousand manuscripts submitted by literary beginners. The number of members of the Union from forty in January 1924 grew to 472 in 1927, 783 in 1928, and 1035 by June 1929. Among them, however, only 50 percent were peasants, the rest being workmen (30 percent),

<sup>5</sup> See above, Ch. III.—Ed.

and employees, teachers, etc. (20 percent). The membership included 35 percent of Communist Youth party men. With such a body it was already possible to begin creating, for the first time, an "authentic peasant literature" in the spirit of Stalin's program. Only the proletarian peasant writers were acknowledged "authentic peasant writers." Klychkov and Kliuev were called reactionary and feudal kulaks, while Esenin had long since been condemned as a pornographic writer. The Fellow Travelers were also repudiated as enemies of social reconstruction, and only the poorer peasants "capable of accepting fully the proletarian point of view," were regarded as possible allies.

On October 4, 1930, the *Pravda* published an article by B. Kushner which summed up the situation we have been discussing on the preceding pages. In this article, devoted to the inefficiency of the Soviet writers, the author described quite unintentionally the truly tragic situation in which literature was placed by the demands addressed to it from the outside in complete disregard of its proper artistic functions. Kushner was forced to admit that the second year of the Five Year Plan, like the first one, had passed without any active participation of proletarian literature in the work of socialistic construction. As heretofore, in spite of an express governmental command, this literature virtually continued to neglect such subjects as the struggle for the general party line, the establishment of a new industrial base in the country, collectivization of villages, liquidation of the kulaks as a class, and such forms of workmen's participation in the socialistic construction as competition, "shock work," etc. Neither the government nor the reading public could be held responsible for the silence preserved by literature on these burning problems.

The opportunity to see and make observations, to study and collect material is offered to our writers, particularly those of the proletariat, with such lavishness that at times it almost verges on extravagance. Regardless of distance and unmindful of cost our writers are sent to old and new concerns, to construction works, to collective and state farms, on long cruises, polar expeditions, and record flights. In all fairness it must be admitted that our writers love to travel, but in an overwhelming majority of cases the application of these experiences to literature is either absent or extremely unsatisfactory.

And yet the period of socialist reconstruction was accompanied by a large increase in the popular demand for books. But still the writers did not want to write. . . . What was the reason? Kushner found it in the "antagonistic and alien influences of literary traditions and established practices." Here, of course, the artistic doctrine of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers was to be severely blamed. In the first place, "the clumsy form of the novel had estranged literary creative genius from the revolutionary tempo of our days." Why should they now ponder over an artistic work? It was a "false principle" not necessary to the proletarian authors, because "the party solved all complex problems" for them. Why follow the "foolish theory of the reincarnation" of the artist in his characters? It could scarcely help to sharpen the author's class vigilance and acuteness. The slogan "living man" was also completely erroneous, because from being a remedy against schematism and standardization it gradually was transformed into the "bourgeois-idealistic" conception of a "harmonious human being" leading to a pernicious form of "psychological realism," which taught "to seek good in evil and to detect pangs of conscience even in a renegade." The doctrine in this way made a proletarian writer an "unprejudiced observer and impartial judge," while such qualities only "weakened his orientation towards the class struggle and the uprooting of capitalism."

According to Kushner's testimony the method of psychological realism "holds a large part of our proletarian writers prisoners, by replacing the problem of creating a new man with an analysis of psychological experiences. . . . The socialist construction . . . is reduced, after all, to a subordinate part of the background, against which is unfolded the personal drama of the characters, while mass psychology is ignored." Kushner advised the Marxist men of letters to "fell and root up all this overgrowth of harmful literary traditions and false theories." In other words, after having made all possible sacrifices the writers were asked to cease being artists and to become merely propagandists of Stalin's policy.

As a result of this situation some writers, unable to follow the dictates of their artistic conscience, felt that there was no longer any place for them in literature, and they simply ceased to write. But there was another interesting phenomenon which was noted

by the Soviet critic Ermilov. It appeared that under the pressure of unrealizable demands a differentiation set in among the literary circles. Simultaneously with the strengthening of the extreme left flank, the other extreme tendency, the bourgeois, also became more strongly pronounced. Those of the Fellow Travelers of the right, who up to that time had cherished the hope of finding a way to reconciliation with the authorities, now despaired of the possibility of adapting themselves to the existing conditions, and so resumed a more independent attitude. Ermilov supported his observation by referring to the evident increase during the preceding two or three years in the interest for the heroes and the psychology of Lermontov. "In Pilniak's latest works," the critic remarked, "we notice the romantic idealization of a strong, adventurous personality, which in an individualistic-anarchistic way is opposing itself to the social surroundings. During recent years the emotional *dominanta* of Vsevolod Ivanov's works has also been tending towards individualism, anarchism, and primitivism." There was formed around Pilniak a literary school of young people, who were working out identical motifs. Thus, in collaboration with Pavlenko, Pilniak wrote a story which had Byron for its hero, while Andrey Novikov, another young follower of Pilniak, wrote *The Origin of Fogginess*, a satirical novel in which, to cite Ermilov's statement, "socialist construction is pictured as a bacchanal of bureaucratic mania for organization, and the chief part is assigned to a petty-bourgeois intellectual with anarchistic tendencies." Likewise in Olesha's (b. 1899) *Envy* the critics pointed out that the individualist Kavalero (one of the principal characters) was too generously endowed by the author with such positive traits as tact, artistic sense, and love of beauty.

It is obvious, however, that under the conditions which prevailed in Russia during Stalin's "socialist offensive" no oppositional moods could have full and free expression. Naturally the right sector of the Soviet literature was dealt the heaviest blow. Vsevolod Ivanov and Babel's last works were not allowed to be published. Pilniak had to make changes in his latest works, and was prohibited from republishing his older ones. M. Bulgakov and many others were reduced to complete silence. In Moscow there was a distinct feeling that Maiakovsky committed suicide

not only because of his disillusionment in the success of Communism, but also because his two plays, *Bathhouse* and *Bedbug*, were banned by the authorities, who detected in them, not without reason, a satire on the Soviet government. Even the proletarian group of writers, to which belonged Libedinsky and his followers, was looked upon with suspicion. Next in turn to enjoy the confidence of those in power was Bezymensky, who for a while became the poet laureate of the Soviet régime.

Under the political conditions existing in Russia a further general decline in the creative activity of Soviet writers seems inevitable. The danger is aggravated by the fact that a new generation brought up in the period after the October Revolution is bound to enter the literary field. This generation has absolutely no connections with the past and has been educated under peculiar conditions.

Our review of the Soviet literature ends rather abruptly. But we can see that the process of its development is far from being completed. Here again we are faced with a situation full of strain and uncertainty. Yet it must be admitted that, under extremely difficult circumstances, Russian literature has not lost its vitality and inner power of resistance.

## EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

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As has been shown in the last chapter, the transition from the NEP to the new socialist offensive was marked, in the field of literature, by increased governmental pressure and by vigorous activity on the part of the proletarian elements among the Russian writers. Simultaneously, a heated discussion was going on in literary circles with regard to the proper scope and character of Soviet literature, its subject matter as well as the best literary methods to be used.

In 1932 a new chapter opened in the history of Soviet literature with the publication of new governmental instructions embodied in a resolution passed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The organizations of the proletarian writers were abolished on the ground that the success of socialist construction had made their existence superfluous, and in their place there was established a single Association of Soviet Writers, proletarian and non-proletarian alike. In the period that followed there was less direct official interference with literature; variety of styles and forms was proclaimed desirable, and the low technical level of much of the existing literary production was frankly recognized, with an advice to the writers to "learn from the classics."

These and other features of the new policy, in the formulation of which one can suspect the influence of Gorky, looked relatively liberal if compared with the situation under the first Five Year Plan. And yet it would be a mistake to think that they signified the establishment of complete artistic freedom in the Soviet Union. While theoretically the writers were free to join or not to join the officially approved Association, in practice those who belonged to it enjoyed such advantages over the non-members that abstention might lead to disastrous results. As for the requirements for membership they included the obligation to adhere to the political

platform of the Soviet government, and to support the work of socialist construction. In a sense, even more significant was the request that the members subscribe to the theory of "Socialist Realism." Thus an attempt was made to secure not only the political loyalty of the writers but also their adherence to a definite literary school.

The slogan of Socialist Realism was advanced with official approbation in order to put an end to the heated controversy which had agitated literary circles during the preceding period. Like the "general party line" in politics, it was a device to insure unity of outlook among the writers by eliminating undesirable deviations towards the extremes. As such it was directed, on the one hand, against "formalism" with its tendency to degenerate into mere aesthetic preoccupation with literary forms and a worship of art for art's sake, and, on the other hand, against a "vulgarized sociological approach" tending to neglect problems of literary technique and to forget about the proper function of literature as art. The writers were expected to be both good craftsmen and good citizens of the socialist state.

In spite of many pronouncements on the subject no completely satisfactory definition of Socialist Realism is available. Perhaps the reason for the lack of such definition lies in the contradictory nature of the term itself. If "realism" means an attempt on the part of the writer to describe life as it is or as he sees it, then no adjective seems to be necessary. A socialist reality would naturally produce a socialist art. By adding the adjective the sponsors of Socialist Realism are virtually telling the writer in what light he *must* see life if he wants to be recognized as a realistic author. But the injection of this "must" element is hardly compatible with "realism" as such—at least, in its more generally accepted meaning.

What it really amounted to was a request for a definite political and social tendency in literature. And both official pronouncements and statements made by the writers themselves, as for instance at the All-Union Literary Congress held in Moscow in August 1934, frankly recognized the ancillary character of Soviet literature as an unavoidable and even a desirable fact. The writers were expected not only "to express in images the new aspect of the country, the changing mode of life, the new thoughts, feelings and as-

pirations of the people" but also to contribute, in a more active fashion, to the growth of this new mode of life and these new thoughts and feelings. In the words of a resolution passed by the Association of Soviet Writers, their works had to be "saturated with the heroic struggle of the international proletariat, with exultation over the victory of socialism, and reflect the great wisdom and heroism of the Communist Party." It was only within those definite ideological boundaries that freedom of artistic expression and variety of individual styles were recognized as legitimate.

One of the more specific demands addressed to literature was that it picture "Bolshevik heroism" as expressing the new "Soviet humanism" which, unlike the bourgeois humanism of the past, aimed not at cultivating the passive sentiment of pity for human misfortune, but at inspiring the readers with an active desire to combat injustice, oppression and inequality. This demand necessitated a search for the "Bolshevik hero" and constant attempts to reproduce him in fiction. It was indicated that his character should be "monolithic" and "sharply defined," without any trace of doubt or ambiguity. In practice it turned out to be a rather difficult task to perform, and Soviet critics continued to complain that convincing and adequate portrayals of "Bolshevik heroes" were rare in Soviet literature. Relatively few works were singled out for praise. A. N. Tolstoy's *Bread* (1937) was hailed as an outstanding achievement because of its treatment of Stalin's and Voroshilov's exploits during the civil war, with Trotsky playing the part of an unredeemed villain. N. Ostrovsky (1904-36), a hitherto unknown author, became a celebrity overnight with the publication of his two novels *How the Steel Was Tempered* and *Born of the Storm*, both extolling the heroism of rank and file Communists during the same period of civil war. Another young writer, N. Virda, dealt with the civil war in his *Solitude* (1936) while his second novel *Inevitability* (1938) depicted the successful struggle of the loyal party men against the Trotskyite wreckers. To the same category of officially approved works belonged V. Kataev's (b. 1897) *Time, Forward!* with its picture of Bolshevik activities on the industrial front under the Five Year Plan. It must be said, however, that a few writers managed to comply with the demands of Socialist Realism in a somewhat less obvious fashion. Thus Iury Herman



(b. 1910) in *Our Acquaintances* (1936) gave the life story of a young Russian girl, with emphasis on her personal vagaries and a good deal of psychological analysis, reminiscent both of the classical Russian tradition and of the manner of the Serapion Brothers, although in the end he safely brought his heroine into the haven of Bolshevik loyalty and a happy marriage with a responsible party worker. A great deal of artistic independence was displayed also by Sholokhov, the first parts of whose *Upturned Soil* (1935) were nevertheless accepted as a successful application of Socialist Realism. The concluding part of his *Quiet Don*, however, published in 1940, produced considerable disappointment because of the failure on the part of the principal hero to become a good Bolshevik.

If, in spite of this, Sholokhov still remained a favorite Soviet author and even one of the official laureates, the fate of some other well-known writers was very different. Iury Olesha, the author of *Envy*, one of the most remarkable novels in Soviet literature, was condemned for his inability to identify himself with the spirit of the time, while both Pilniak and Babel were virtually silenced.

In accordance with the general trend of governmental policy during recent years, another demand addressed to Soviet writers was that they produce "defense literature" with the purpose of stimulating Soviet patriotism and readiness to protect the country from a possible foreign attack. The fulfillment of this request in most cases took the form of writing appropriate historical novels. To be sure, the growth of the historical novel in Soviet Russia antedated this last official command. But in the earlier period it served different aims. For some authors it apparently was a welcome avenue of escape into the neutral field of a literary and artistic past (witness the considerable number of fictionized biographies of famous writers and artists published in Soviet Russia), while others used the historical novel for the purpose of reconstructing Russian revolutionary tradition. Some of the novels of the latter category were published during the period under consideration, as, for example, Kataev's *The Lone White Sail* (1936) dealing with the experiences of a group of boys in the revolution of 1905, or Chapygin's (b. 1870) story of the Streltsy revolt in the late seventeenth century (1938). But more typical of the new

trend were historical novels of a different nature—those rehabilitating certain events and figures of Russia's historical past from a patriotic point of view. Here, as in literature in general, the novel had to serve a political purpose, and history was called upon to teach a useful lesson in connection with burning contemporary problems. Such was the obvious purpose of A. N. Tolstoy's *Peter I* (1934), one of the most effective works of this gifted writer, in which the sympathetic treatment of the reforming tsar tended to make of him a remote forerunner of Bolshevism. Other novels as well as historical dramas were dedicated either to the military exploits of such individual heroes as Dmitry Donskoy, Minin and Pozharsky, Suvorov, Kutuzov and Admiral Makarov, or else extolled the heroism of the plain Russian soldier as in Sergeiev-Tsensky's (b. 1876) story of the defense of Sevastopol during the Crimean War (published in three volumes in 1939-40). In this connection one should mention also the huge success of P. Pavlenko's *In the East* (1937). This is not a historical novel, but it belongs to "defense literature" dealing as it does with an imaginary war between the Soviet Union and Japan. In this work, as in many of the recent historical novels, we can plainly see the reflection of a new and significant phenomenon—that of nascent Soviet nationalism.

MICHAEL KARPOVICH

*Cambridge, Mass.*

*October, 1941*



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## NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Most of the works of Russian classics and many of those of contemporary writers are available in English translations. Partial lists of these translations can be found in D. S. Mirsky's *History of Russian Literature* and *Contemporary Russian Literature*, and in G. Struve's *Soviet Russian Literature*. Below are cited some particularly useful anthologies.

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